

DIALOGUE

A Muslim Perspective

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my duty to verbalize my profound gratitude towards my parents Mr. Gh. Nabi Dar and Mrs. Farhana (Farooqa), who exhibited their intact confidence and reliance upon me. I also thank my elder brother late Mr. Nayeem Gul Dar, Computer Engineer by profession, another brother Mr. Nadeem Gul Dar, Infection Control Specialist, King Saud Medical City, Riyad, for their brotherly love and encouragement.

In the completion of present work I owe to the support of various scholars, teachers, librarians and friends. I think it is my pleasure to record their gratitude. In the first place I owe profound thanks and gratitude to my respected and beloved teacher Prof. Dr. Mohd. Ishaque, Dept. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. I feel highly indebted to Prof. Akhtarul Wasey, Dept. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, for adding valuable insights into this work. I am also thankful to Prof. Hamid Naseem Rafiafadi, Dept. of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar. His valuable guidance, comments, and prompt advices were always kept available by him for me. My heartiest and deepest thanks specially goes to Prof. Syed Yunus Gilani, ex-Head, Dept. of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, presently in Islamic University of Malaysia, who had been kind enough to me in providing subject material from time to time whenever a request was made to him, his keen interest and substantive discussions and suggestions (through e-mail) became instrumental to improve the quality of the present work. I express my heartiest thanks to him for his erudite conscientious and efficacious guidance and approach. He is one amongst the few specials, to whom companionship and tutorship I owe a lot. I am grateful to my teachers of University of Kashmir and Jamia Millia Islamia for providing all possible help, assistance, guidance, and cooperation during the pursuit of this work amongst whom are Prof. Naseem Ahmad Shah, Dept. of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, Dr. Ab.

Rasheed Bhat, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, Dr. Manzoor Ahmad Bhat, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, Prof. Razi Ahmad Kamal, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, Prof. Iqtidar Mohd. Khan, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

It is worthy to mention name and record the gratitude of Engineer Ashiq Hussain Untoo, among those valuable, but a few persons who helped me in adding to the precious treasure of my Islamic knowledge by his lovely compassionate teaching of Qur'ān and Hadīth and also for his simplicity, sincerity and God consciousness and of course for his service towards humanity and thus towards the Islam. My rich and healthy gratitude goes to Mr. AJM Zaneer, Srilanka, who provided me with the relevant reading material. I am also thankful to Prof. Muhammad Shafiq who sent me his co-authored book "Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims" through e-mail. I also feel obliged to thank all those who have been kind enough to help me in one way or the other.

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INTRODUCTION

**In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
All praise be to Allah, we praise Him and seek His help and
forgiveness. We seek refuge with Allah from the evil of our
own selves and from our evil deeds. Whomsoever Allah
guides, no one can lead astray, and whomsoever Allah
leaves astray, no one can guide. I bear witness that there is
no god but Allah alone, with no partner or associate, and I
bear witness that Muhammad (SAAS) is His slave and
Messenger.**

In this work I aim at presenting the basis of dialogue in Islam and the history of the interaction between Muslims and adherents of other faiths and its possible implications for the future of the present world in order to search for the areas of mutual concern between Muslims and followers of other faiths. Thus in this historical background I want to make a special study about the state of present unfortunate communication gape between Muslims and followers of other faiths on the one hand and on the other I feel in wake of the recent unfortunate happenings, such a study has become more relevant and necessary.

Being one among the world Religions and claiming to be the Religion of all human, Islam had to relate itself to the religions of mankind and through them to humanity. Therefore, al-Qur'ān as well as prophet Muhammad (SAAS) never foreclosed the channels of dialogue with non-Muslims. Dialogue is in fact a religious duty for Muslims. Muslims had to participate in dialogues with others so as to clear all the misconceptions that they may have about Islam so that there will be no barrier in creating a peaceful world.

Claiming to be a peaceful religion, Islam forbids the Muslims from abusing the idols or deities worshipped by others. It commands Muslims to call others to Islam, but there is to be

no compulsion at all involved. Invitation is to be made with wisdom and fair preaching and argumentation is to be made in a better way. Apart from this, Islam invites the non-Muslims towards, “common points”, “propositions”, “agreements”, or “tenets”, so that cooperation can be made, rather than differences.

This study which elaborates the title, “Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective” has been classified into these chapters.

Introduction: This section elaborates the need and importance of this work, and gives a brief introduction of whole of the work. It is thus the fore-impression of the subject.

1. Preliminary Discourse – I: This chapter discusses the concept of Allah and gives the evidences and proofs of the existence of Him, it also discusses the concept of morality, and gives a brief sketch of ’Imān or faith/ belief. It affirms that there is no monopoly in the message of Allah, and it admits that Islam rejects any kind of racism, and that there are diverse faiths in the world of ours. It discusses the concept of peace in Islam, and demonstrates the freedom and free will of mankind, and especially in the case of religious beliefs. It mentions the Qur’ānic view of other religions, and admits that Islam recognizes other religions, and the Qur’ānic concept of ’Ahl al-Kitāb, and the religions other than ’Ahl al-Kitāb especially Indian religions are also discussed. It highlights the efficacy of dialogue in creating the atmosphere of understanding between different religious traditions. It thus creates a stand and platform for the cordial existence of the followers of different faiths.

2. Preliminary Discourse – II: This chapter explains the necessity of dialogue for Muslims to successfully follow the fundamentals of Islam. Mainly it highlights the effects of globalization and the benefits of coexistence, tolerance, non-violence, areas of mutual concern, and common terms between

Muslims and non-Muslims. It also throws light on *jihād* and *qitāl*, current situations and guiding principles and aims, objectives, orientations, and etiquette of dialogue.

3. Dialogue in the Islamic Tradition: This chapter investigates the roots of dialogue in the Islamic traditional knowledge and lore. Thus it searches for the foundation of dialogue in the Qur’ān and the prophetic traditions. Moreover it also highlights the principles of dialogue, mainly the principle of having no compromise in the matter of faith.

4. A Brief History of Dialogue: This chapter brings to light dialogue in the historical context. It also highlights institutions and organizations of dialogue. Moreover it gives a sketch of ‘ilm al-kalām, the steps taken towards interfaith dialogue in the recent times, and the importance of interfaith dialogue in the historical context.

Conclusion: It concludes the study with the main focus on the need of dialogue, dialogue in the contemporary world, hurdles in the way of dialogue and the etiquette of dialogue. It also brings forth the outcome of dialogue which is also the outcome of this study.

In this work I have used SWT for *Subḥānahu wa T’ālā*, SAAS for *Sall Al-lāhu ’Alyhi wa Sallam*, AS for ‘Alyhis Salām or ‘Alyhim us-Salām, RA for *Razi Allāhu ’Anhu* or *Razi Allāhu ’Anhā* or *Razi Allāhu ’Anhum*. Allah in Islam is the name for God, and the *Qur’ān* is the final message from Him. By *Hadīth* Muslims mean sayings, doings, and silent approvals of final *nabi* Muhammad (SAAS). I have also used *nabi* for prophet, *nabiyūn* for prophets, *rasūl* for messenger, *rusul* for messengers, *suhābī* for follower or companion of Muhammad (SAAS), *suhābā* for followers or companions of Muhammad (SAAS), *masjid* for mosque, *sūrah* for chapter, *suwar* for chapters, and *al-Khulafā’ al-Rāshidīn* for Rightly Guided Caliphs. I have tried to maintain original Arabic words because

there meaning is much more than those English words used for the understanding of non-Arabs.

CHAPTER I

Preliminary Discourse – I

The fundamental unity of mankind was revealed at their creation. When Adam and Eve came into being, Allah (SWT) drew forth from their loins all the children of Adam, from the first human being to the last, and called for their testimony:

When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): “Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?”— They said: “Yea! We do testify!” (This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: “Of this we were never mindful”.¹

The first covenant obligates people to know Allah (SWT), to know one another as one people, and to build the friendly relations essential for peaceful coexistence on earth. The Qur’ān repeatedly emphasizes on the unity of mankind, i.e., they come from the same parents:

O mankind! Fear your Guardian Lord, who created you from a single Person, created, out of it, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women;—fear Allah, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and be heedful of the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you.²

Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), the last and final messenger of Allah (SWT), in his farewell Hajj sermon delivered on the 9th

¹*The Qur’ān*, 7:172.

²Ibid., 4:1.

day of *Dhul-Hijjah*, 10 A.H. in the 'Uranah valley of Mount Arafat in Makkah, said:

All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor does a black have any superiority over white except by piety and good action.¹

The reason why Islam recognizes so many prophets (*nabiyūn*) and so many messengers or apostles (*rusul*) is because Allah reveals Himself in such installments across time and across space.² Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) was the last prophet (*nabi*). The stories of former prophets (AS), which are reckoned to constitute about a quarter of the Qur'ān, are thus not merely encouragement for Muhammad (SAAS) and his companions (RA) and followers but also an assertion that he (SAAS) had a long spiritual ancestry and that previous prophets (AS) had had similar experiences to his (SAAS).³ Thus the prophets (AS) were the channels through which mankind was reminded that which it already possessed. Among this possession the concept of Allah is the basic one.

Concept of Allah:

This concept is ingrained in the very conscience of man from the very outset. What the Qur'ān does is that it only reminds

¹*Al-Mo'jam al-Kabīr Li Tabarānī*, H. No. 14444.

²Mazrui, Ali A., "Liberal Islam Versus Moderate Islam: Elusive Moderates and the Siege Mentality", *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Ed. Katherine Bullock, Association of Muslim Social Scientists and International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, USA, vol. 22, Summer 2005, No. 3, p.86.

³Watt, William Montgomery, *Muslim-Christian encounters Perceptions and misperceptions*, Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane London EC4P 4EE and Routledge 29 west 35th street New York, NY10001, 1991, p. 10.

this concept.¹ However, man gets convinced for this on his own decision. Actually, the helplessness and vulnerability of man against the vast Nature has always persuaded him for a Being to rely upon and seek sustenance and support from. Although called as ‘fear factor’ by psychologists but given the fact that man is almost an insignificant creature when compared with the majestic Universe, the fact is that a being (like man) of such great intellectual faculties large enough to discover and disclose the secrets of nature is rendered meaningless if it is not attached to, in one way or the other, with the Supreme. However, in quest for the truth of the Supreme the struggle of every human being has differed from the other. Certain individuals, in every age, have been very sensitive for this purpose. Also, it is because of this difference in the sensitivity for the Truth that some stopped just after recognizing the Supreme, while as others, after recognition were satisfied only after worshipping and cherishing the Supreme. The best example of the latter stock, besides others, were the sensitive people, although a few, of pre-Islamic Arabia who were called *Hunafā*. They were all truth seekers. Confining themselves to solitary places, they would remember Allah and say: “O God if we had known how to worship You, we would have worshipped You accordingly.”²

As such, the concept of such kind of a Being is but a necessary prerequisite of man’s being a special creature in the universe. And for such a concept of the Supreme Being certain arguments are offered below:

1. Evidence of Man’s Inner Self:- So far as man’s constitution, whether physical, spiritual, or intellectual, is concerned it has always shown not only an inclination but also a great affinity for the Supreme Being or Allah. It is so because the ‘Inner Self’ of man finds itself restless and meaningless

¹Ghamidi, Javed Ahmad, *Meezan*, Al-Mawrid, Lahore, 2007, p.87.

²Wahiduddin Khan, Maulana, *Islam Rediscovered*, Goodword books, Delhi, 2005, p. 13.

without having a relation with the Supreme. It finds solace by being attached and related to the Supreme just like a baby is attracted by the mere mention (sight) of his mother.¹ Or it is just like a thirsty person who quenches his thirst by water. He does not need explanation and argument for the quality of water (whether it would quench thirst or not). Similarly ‘the Inner Self’ of man gets tranquility and peace as soon as he gets the threshold of the Being or Allah. This fact can be illustrated in other words as:

This awareness has been bestowed upon man in the form of inborn knowledge. Thus, every human soul, at the time of birth, is born as an ‘abd and a ‘Muslim’ (one who submits to God) and a *hanif* (one who turns away from all that is false and returns to God alone). This is what has been characterized by the Qur’ān as *Fitrat Allāh* (God’s Religion) on which man is created.²

2.Historical continuity of the evidence provided by Man’s Inner Self:- Although it has been argued by certain scholars that the concept of the Supreme Being is nothing but the creation of man’s ‘fear complex’ about the natural phenomena before which he finds himself utterly helpless, but the fact is that it never happened in history that mankind, as a totally, was bereft of the consciousness about the Supreme. If the case had been the one as suggested by these scholars then we must have the knowledge about the particular point of time when this concept crept in in the conscience of man. However, the fact is that man, generation after generation, has become familiar with this concept just like a man becomes familiar about his parents³, gradually with continuity. It is because of this continuity that man turns to Allah easily and without reluctance

¹Meezan, op.cit., p. 88.

²Aasi, Ghulam Haider, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions*, International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Pakistan, 1991, p.6.

³Meezan, op.cit., pp. 91-2. See also, p. 112.

whenever he gets astray. “It is because God is self-subsisting. He needs no proofs for his existence. The reason for God being self evident is twofold. Firstly, the existence of the universe itself is a proof of the existence of God. Secondly, man’s existence in itself is a proof of God’s existence. Therefore, man believes in God, because he is bound to believe in him.”¹ As such the concept is not borrowed from without but it is the voice from within the man.

3.The evidence of Man’s Intellect:- Man has always tested his conscience about Allah, the Supreme Being, supported by historical continuity, by the application of his intellectual faculty. No doubt man’s ‘Inner Self’ gets solace and satisfaction by nothing less than the concept of the Supreme Being, but it is an irrefutable fact that he has always tried to check this evidence by his mental faculty. For this purpose he analyses different forces of nature, their composition, their function, their inter-connectivity, their usefulness for each other generally and for man particularly, so on and so forth; in all this he sees a design and a purpose.² The Qur’ān has, time and again referred to instances in which man’s intellect leads him to Allah. For example:

Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, so that he might become a firm believer. When night overshadowed him, he saw a star. He said: ‘This is my Lord’. But when it set, he said: ‘I love not those that set.’ Then when he saw the moon rising, he said: ‘This is my Lord.’ But when it set, he said: ‘Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray’. Then when he saw the sun rising, he said: ‘This is my Lord. This is the greatest.’ But when it set, he said: ‘O my

¹*Islam Rediscovered*, op.cit., p. 34.

²*Meezan*, op. cit., pp. 88-9. See also the *Qur’ān*, 24:35 & pp. 102-3.

people! Surely, I am done with what you associate with Allah.¹

Thus, man simply infers that the Power behind the design and purpose (of the Nature) is nothing but the Supreme Designer or simply Allah. Thus the intellect gives the evidence of Allah.

4.Evidence of the Prophets of Allah:- History is on record that from amongst the mankind at particular periods of time significant and special (chosen of Allah) men arose who claimed that they were chosen by Allah to call the people to Him because the latter had gone astray. This call used to be genuine because it matched with the voice² and liking of the ‘Inner Self’ of man, was in accord with the historical continuity of the evidence of Allah and it was also much according to the decision of man’s intellect. Thus:

God did not leave man to himself alone. Rather, He helped and guided him with the revelation of His Divine Will to remind him of his raison d’être [d’être]. God revealed His Will through prophets or messengers who summoned the people back to *Din al-Fitrah*. The prophets also provided mankind with models of its practice. They reclaimed mankind from their deviation from *Din al-Fitrah*, warning it of the grave consequences of such deviation. Some people followed the prophets, teachings and returned to *Din al-Fitrah*.³

Moreover, these persons, called prophets⁴ were most reliable and trustworthy in every respect. And the most important thing

¹The *Qur’ān*, 6:75-8 vide *Islam Rediscovered*, op.cit. See also *Meezan*, op. cit., p.25.

²*Meezan*, op. cit., pp. 128-9.

³Aasi, Ghulam Haider, op. cit., p.8.

⁴*Meezan*, op. cit., pp. 126-7.

about these specially gifted and chosen men was that they always brought forth the same truth that is the reality of Allah.

5.Evidence of Divine Intervention, witnessed throughout History at different occasions:- The truth conveyed to the mankind through the prophets of Allah was actually the voice and call of human nature. The truth that man's 'Inner Self' has a liking for the Supreme is not incomprehensible. This is because Allah had disclosed His Self before Adam and his progeny on the very first day and the whole mankind had accepted Allah as its Lord.¹ The Qur'ān, in this regard says:

When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam—From their loins—Their descendants, and made them Testify concerning themselves, (saying): “Am I not your Lord (Who cherishes and sustains you)?”— They said: “Yea! We do testify!” (This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: “Of this we were never mindful”.²

It is this consciousness and concept which has passed from generation to generation through the psyche of man. And it is for the regeneration and reactivation of this concept that Allah sent His prophets (AS) from time to time. However, mostly it happened that people rejected their call. As this attitude of people was against³ the voice of their 'Inner Self', the historical continuity of the concept of Allah, the decision of man's own intellect and the struggle of the prophets (AS), man was taken into task by 'Divine Intervention'. It is because the door for any excuse on the part of man was shut that can be simply discerned from the last part of the above-quoted verse. Thus, according to that Covenant with Allah there remained,

¹Ibid., p.88. See also the *Qur'ān*, 7:172-4.

²The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary, the Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance, al-Madinah al-Munawarah, 1413 A.H., 7:172.

³Meezan, op. cit., p. 129. See also, pp. 149-50.

No excuse for any individual to say, either (1) that he was unmindful, or (2) that he should not be punished for the sins of his fathers, because his punishment (if any) comes from his personal responsibility and is for his own rejection of faith and the higher spiritual influences.¹

Since every chance for the excuse of man was eliminated, therefore, at different points of time Allah intervened directly to chastise the transgressors. For example, the people of Noah were taken by the Great Storm, the Egyptians led by Pharaoh were drowned in the Sea. Similarly the nations of *Hūd* ('Ad), *Sālih* (*thamīd*) and *Lūt* were also revenged by Allah. However, the final Direct Intervention was different and peculiar. This time neither of the natural phenomena destroyed the people who rejected the call of the final prophet. It was through the arm of the prophet (SAAS) and his companions that defeated the hosts of falsehood. Not only this but the concept of 'Godlessness' was ideologically wiped out from the surface of *Hijaz* in its first phase and was totally washed off the surface of the earth in its second phase through the *Khilafat-i Rashidah*. Thus could be understood the purport of the Qur'ānic verse,

...Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure...²

Because "the principle involved was that of all worship, Jewish or Christian as well as Muslim, and of all foundations built for pious uses."³

¹*The Holy Qur-ān*, IFTA, op. cit., p. 457.

²Ibid., 22:40.

³Ibid., p. 962.

As such, these Divine Interventions were but the introductions for the final Divine Intervention that will be caused by Allah on the Doomsday. Thus, if compared with the Doomsday, the Divine Interventions witnessed throughout the human history could be called ‘little Doomsdays’, in which the people were given what their hands had committed. However the absolute justice will be witnessed on the Doomsday.

Mankind has given expression to this consciousness by naming the Supreme Being in a number of ways, giving the basic sense of Allah, the Almighty.

The word ‘Allah’ is used by all Muslims including non-Arabs as the name of God. Most Arabic speaking non-Muslims too use the word for the name of God. ‘Allah’ is used in Arabic for God of all, the One and Only God. There is no plural form of the word ‘Allah’ in Arabic like Gods in English. Generally believed to be formed of *Al* (the) + *Ilah* (god), its root is arguably the oldest word used for a ‘deity’ or ‘to worship’ in many Semitic and non-Semitic civilizations.¹

Sanskrit: Agni Mile: (Rigveda 1:1:1) I
worship the Foremost. Ilāyastvā
Padē vayam Nābhā Prithivyā
Adhi: (Rigveda 3:29:4) Our
Place of God is at the navel of
the earth.

A mysterious symbol in Hindu tradition, spelled as Ohm and considered very pious, is also called ‘Ulta Akchhar’ (invert letter). Interestingly if we rotate it clockwise it be read as Allah in Arabic

¹Abdullah Tariq, “Islamic Terminology–1 Allāh: (Arab. = God)”, in *Islam, Muslims & the World*, Ed., Javed Jamil, Dec. 2008, Saharanpur, p. 6.

Pali:	Lah: god: The old name of Tibet was Lhasa, ‘The house of god’.
Hawaiian:	Aloha=alo (presence) + hā (breath or essence of life). Hawaii’s nick name is ‘State of Aloha’.
Levantine:	Ēl or Il: Father of humankind and all creations.
Hebrew:	El: God, god. The word occurs in the Bible more than 200 times. Elahi or Eli, (Greek-Eloi) My God. “Eli Eli (in some Bible versions Eloi Eloi) lema sabachthani? (Matt.27:46, Mark 15:34)” is the only sentence occurring in Christ’s own language in all languages of the N.T. [New Testament] Translations. It means, ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Eloah: God. The word occurs in O.T. [Old Testament] 57 times. Elohim: The plural form of Eloah, used for One God as a mark of respect. Occurred in O.T. [Old Testament] about 2500 times. Other cognates (having similar root and meaning) of the word El or Il are; Canaanite: El, Western Semitic: Ālōhō, Eastern Semitic: Alāhā, Aramaic: Elāhā, Akkadian: ilu: Mesopotamian: ilu etc. ¹

¹Ibid.

The word Allah is used in the Qur'ān 2698 times, the next most occurring word *Al-Rahim* (Ever Compassionate) being used 114 times.¹ The Qur'ān says:

Say: “Call upon Allah, or call upon *Rahmān*:
By whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is
well): for to Him belong the Most Beautiful
Names...”.²

In the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, there are nearly 400 attributive names (including famous 99 names described in a Ḥadīth) of Allah but on the basis of the Qur'ān 17:10, most scholars opine that He may be invoked in any language by any good attributive name as all good attributes in its highest purity are the attributes of Allah. His attributes however are considered among ‘*Mutashābihāt*’ (allegorical) as “... there is nothing whatever like unto Him...”³.

According to Islam, Allah is the sole Creator and Sustainer and Lord of all creation. There is no other worthy of worship except Him. He alone is truly One, neither begets nor begotten. On the Last Day (of life on this earth), He will judge all human beings and some invisible beings (jinns) according to their faith and deeds. He is Seer, Knower and Hearer of all things. Allah is Al-mighty, All-Powerful. Compassion, Beneficence and Mercy are His attributes. Submission to the Will of Allah in Arabic is Islam.⁴

Quite interestingly, the consciousness about the Supreme Reality resulted in the formation of moral code by mankind which was given an organized shape by Islam through the prophets (AS).

¹Ibid.

²*The Qur'ān*, 17:110.

³Ibid., 42:11.

⁴Islamic Terminology–1, op. cit., p.6.

Morality:

There are, in fact many a commonality among different apparently divergent sections of mankind. Talking in specifically organic terms, every human being constitutes of the organic matter irrespective of his/her habitation. It is also a borne out fact that mankind has descended from the common parents. It is also a common observation that to changing phenomena of weather, climate and atmosphere, men, no matter where do they live, show almost common response and reaction.

Interestingly enough, the collective conscience of man has always shown a common sensitivity to the different odds or evils that it faced at different stages of the development of human civilization. Man has never remained silent or passive before falsehood, injustice, oppression, persecution, etc. Even on the individual level he has never remained immune from or unaffected by the wrong deeds performed by him willy nilly. This is hinted to in the Qur'ān through Ādam's son, *Qābil* (Cain) who had killed his brother *Hābil* (Abel) and did not know how to dispose off his corpse:

Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide the naked body of his brother. "Woe is me!" said he; "was I not even able to be as this raven, and to hide the naked body of my brother?" Then he became full of regrets.¹

Thus, it seems that, like the 'physical behavior' of man which motivates him to guard himself against different forces of nature, mankind has a common 'moral behavior/basis/ground' according to which it responds the issues of morality. It is because of this common moral sense throughout the mankind

¹The Qur'ān, 5:31.

that the moral fabric of mankind remains intact in spite of the rebellious attitude of different individuals or groups against it. Here, it is worth mentioning that this moral basis of mankind has always shielded it, although there has always been substantial number of people who tried to turn this fabric asunder. Thus, mankind, as a whole, has always had this strong moral basis to further its development unhindered. Thus:

Morality and Ethics is not externally imposed thing on man; in fact it is the real expression of man's self. If man comes to realize his real self he will see nothing opposing his desire; until and unless man does not realize his self, his condition (may be he has saved from evil) will torture him in his mind and heart.¹

As such, the fundamental sense of morality of mankind is just like its concept of the Supreme One, Allah. Like the concept of Allah, the moral consciousness of man is a commonality that integrates mankind and safeguards its unity. That is why, in every age and in every 'group' of humanity, the persons who stood to set aright the moral order, when it had got weakened, preached the same moral ideals. The values which they strove for were in no way new or strange to the psyche of man. Rather it was a renewal or refreshment of those moral standards which were/are ingrained in the conscience and psyche of man. Thus by applying the religious (*Shari'ah*) terminology, we can say that:

After faith the second important requirement of religion is purification of morals. This means that a person should cleanse his attitude both towards his creator and towards his fellow human beings. This is what is termed as a righteous deed. All the *shari'ah* is its corollary.

¹Khan, M. Farooq, *Kalam-i Nabuvat*, Markazi Maktaba Islami, Delhi, 1998, vol. II, pp. 31-2.

With the change and evolution in societies and civilizations, the *shari'ah* has indeed changed; however faith and righteous deeds, which are the foundations of religion, have not undergone any change. The Qur'ān is absolutely clear that any person who brings forth these two things before the Almighty on the Day of Judgment will be blessed with Paradise, which shall be his eternal abode.¹

In the (pure) religious realm too, the moral consciousness of man is among the fundamentals of religious ethics. That is why every prophet (AS), from *Ādam* to Muhammad (SAAS), preached the same morality. This together with the fundamental beliefs of monotheism, afterlife and prophecy this moral cord forms a link between the basic prophetic teachings. Thus the prophets (AS) as the upholders of the morality were the persons who symbolized the moral sense that they stood for. Thus we see:

'The Religion' brought forth by the prophets has made its adherents subservient to some rites and etiquettes. Since the goal of 'the religion' is the purification of the self (*Tazkiyyah Nafs*), therefore, these principles of daily behavior have been sent to achieve this goal. At the advent of the Prophet, the rites of the *Ibrahimic* religion were present among the Arabs. The Prophet did not add them any thing as such. These are what is called 'The way of Ibrahim' (*Sunnat-i Ibrahim*) which has come down to the 'ummah with continuity.²

¹Ghamidi, Javed Ahmad, Ed., *The Monthly Renaissance*, Al-Mawrid, Lahore, August, 2008, p.36.

²Ghamidi, Javed Ahmad, *Rasum-o Aadaab*, Al-Mawrid, Lahore, 2008, p.1.

With the last Prophet (SAAS) the moral framework set and refreshed by the previous prophets (AS) reached its culmination. Again, the last Prophet (SAAS) did not formulate any new rules of morality. What he (SAAS) did was the ‘completion’ of the moral conscience and moral behavior of man. Like the great prophets (AS) of the past the final prophet (SAAS) was at the highest¹ level of morality which he had to preach and set the best example² for others. This fact is best explained by the Prophet (SAAS) in these words: “I have been raised (but) to complete the morality”.³

Here, it is worth mentioning that the Arabs prior to the prophet hood of Muhammad (SAAS) had a substantial structure of morals. According to Hamiduddin Farahi:

The Qur’ānic term *ma’rūf* refers to what was welcomed as virtuous by the Arabs of the time of the Prophet (SAW) and its opposite *munkar* signifies what they detested as evil. The Arabs of pre-Islamic age were not animals living in a jungle destitute of any sense of good and evil....He [the prophet (SAAS)] did not aim at revolutionizing the society and toppling the existing setup. He, rather, adopted the method of gradual improvement, complementing the existing concepts of good and virtue. This is because he had to confirm the previous religious traditions in a specific way and to remove what wrong and unfounded things were mixed with them. He purified the religion of all human manipulations and brought the people on

¹*The Qur’ān*, 68:4.

²Ibid., 33:21.

³Albani, *al-Ahadith al-Sahihah* in *Meezan*, op. cit., p.197.

the path of God's guidance, initially implanted in human nature (*Fitrah*).¹

As the sense of morality is common to all humanity, the prophet (SAAS) had to preach it, as it is, to the whole mankind. This is how the Qur'ān addresses the prophet (SAAS): "Hold to forgiveness; command what is right; but turn away from the ignorant."²

Here, the word '*urf* (right/good/known) signifies the basic moral sense which includes all what is known and understood as good by the whole humanity. Thus the prophet (SAAS), as the representative of all the prophets (AS), invited people to the 'good' as understood by them. As such, the prophet (SAAS) activated the basic moral sense that motivates a person for virtue, as says the Qur'ān:

Verily this Qur-ān doth guide to that which is most right (or stable), and giveth the glad tidings to the believers who work deeds of righteousness, that they shall have a magnificent reward.³

Such a reward, however, comes from the morals defined by the prophet (SAAS) as:

Usama bin Shareek says that we were sitting in the presence of the messenger of Allah so quietly—as if the birds were perched on our heads. No body had the courage to open his mouth. In the meantime some people came and asked the prophet: "Amongst slaves of God who is the dearest to Him?" the prophet replied

¹Renaissance, op. cit., January, 2009, pp. 29-31, (Translated from Farāhi's *Majmū'ah Tafsīr*).

²The Qur'ān, 7:199.

³Ibid., 17:9.

“the one who has the best moral character”. Another Hadith has it that they asked; ‘what is the best thing given to the people?’ To which prophet replied, ‘Excellent moral character’. The prophet was asked; “which Muslim has the perfect faith?” He answered; “one who has the best moral character.”¹

Thus the moral virtues are nothing but the expression or externalization of the basic moral sense of man. That is, whatever good a man does is what is expected of him. The fact has been explained by the prophet (SAAS) as: “Virtue is the good morals, and sin is what renders your heart troubled and it (sin) is what you would not like others know.”² This has been explained by the Qur’ān as: “We showed him the Way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful.”³

Thus it is the already known path which is made clear by the Qur’ān. A scholar has put this fact in these words:

Every human being will be put to trial on the basis of his belief, actions and utterances. So Islam enjoins upon its votaries to make the present life as glorious as possible for which a detailed moral conduct is prescribed in the Shariah which derive its precepts from the Sacred Text and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet.⁴

¹Ibn Hisham and Tirmidhi in Wani, Mohd. Maqbool, *Contemporary Moral Issues and Islam*, Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Deptt. of Islamic Studies, JMI, N.D., 2006, p. 64.

²Muslim in Meezan, op. cit., p.199.

³The Qur’ān, 76:3.

⁴Salim, Muhammad Kunju, *Islam: Ethics and Teachings*, Kitab Bhavan, Delhi, 1991, pp. 10-11.

The Qur'ān has put forward the following framework as the basic and essential morality:

The Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them but address them, in terms of honour. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: "My Lord! Bestow on them the Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood. Your Lord knoweth best what is in your hearts: If ye do deeds of righteousness, verily He is Most Forgiving to those who turn to Him again and again (in true penitence). And render to the kindred their due rights, as (also) to those in want, and to the wayfarer: But squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the Satans. And the Satan is to his Lord (Himself) ungrateful. And even if thou hast to turn away from them in pursuit of the Mercy from thy Lord which thou dost expect, yet speak to them a word of easy kindness. Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard's) to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute. Verily thy Lord doth provide sustenance in abundance for whom He pleaseth, and He straiten it for He doth know and regard all His servants. Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide, sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin. Nor come nigh to adultery: For it is an indecent (deed) and an evil way. Nor take life—which Allah has made sacred—except for just cause. And if anyone is slain wrongfully, We have

given his heir authority (to demand Qisās or to forgive): but let him not exceed bounds in the matter of taking life; for he is helped (by the Law). Come not nigh to the orphan's property except to improve it, until he attains the age of full strength; and fulfil (every) engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning). Give full measure when ye measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight: That is better and fairer in the final determination. And pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge; for surely the hearing, the sight, the heart all of those shall be questioned of. Nor walk on the earth with insolence: for thou canst not rend the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height. Of all such things the evil is hateful in the sight of thy Lord.¹

These morals could be suitably called the ‘essential morality’ and about these Allah says: “These are among the (precepts of) wisdom, which thy Lord has revealed to thee.”² For, these commandments carry not only the individual importance, but they are also having the collective and social importance. Because,

social-consciousness and morality is very essential. If the social-system is good, the good elements or members of it shall prosper and succeed. But if the system is evil, the evil elements shall grow stronger and stronger, leaving the good elements choked and ineffective. The onslaught on them will crush them thereby making them disappear (almost) from the surface. Such state of affairs leaves the

¹The Qur'ān, 17:23-38.

²Ibid., 17:39.

good-ones on the path of trials and tribulations in the society! To prevent such imbalance and keep it in a healthy state of affairs. Qur'an says: "(believers are those) who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil".¹

So far as the ultimate goal of morality is concerned, it is different to different people. Some say that it is to achieve happiness as the ultimate end. Others say that by abiding by the moral values, one gets the self exalted (which the self is meant for and which it cherishes). Yet others say that the goal is to please the Lord by following the Divine commandments. But in Islam, the real goal is the purification of the self (*Tazkiyyah Nafs*). However, the purification of the self would include all the other three goals. That is after purification of the self man would be happy, exalted and destined to get the Divine reward by pleasing the Lord.² Thus says the Qur'ān:

(To the righteous soul will be said:) "O (thou) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord,-well pleased (thyself), and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then, among my Devotees! Yea, enter thou My Heaven!"³

It is obvious that the whole structure of morality emerges from the belief in the Supreme Being or commonly Allah. This belief is discussed below.

Imān (Faith or Belief):

According to Encyclopedia Americana, Faith as a theological term, has several related meanings. (1) "Faith" denotes a kind of knowledge, different from empirical knowledge. (2) "Faith"

¹Wani, Mohd. Maqbool, op. cit., p.88.

²Meezan, op. cit., p. 201.

³The Qur'ān, 89:27-30.

is a synonym for assent. (3) “Faith” is used linguistically in a way similar to declaring, “I believe in....” (4) “Faith” is a synonym for “religion”. What a religion has faith in is a distinguished characteristic of the religion; thus one speaks of the Hindu faith, the Christian faith, and so on.¹ The very name of the world religion of Islam means submission, or surrender, to the will of Allah. It is a key concept in the Bible and in Christian writings. It is especially important in the works of Luther, who repeatedly emphasized the surrender of the whole person to the will of God. Even Martin Luther, who stressed faith as a meaning trust, the surrender of the whole person to God, nevertheless looked beyond it to what one has faith in.² In Islam, however:

The inner aspect of religion is “imān” (belief). As per its details mentioned in the Qur’ān, this inner aspect also consists of five things [it also includes belief in Divine Predestination and life after death]:
 1. Belief in God 2. Belief in Angels 3. Belief in Prophets 4. Belief in Divine Books 5. Belief in the Day of Judgement.³

Belief in Allah requires a complete knowledge of Him. Therefore:

The basic principle concerning the Names and Attributes (al-asma wa-sifaat) of Allah is to affirm whatever Allah affirmed for Himself and whatever His Messenger sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam affirmed for Him; but without resemblance (tamtheel) or questioning how (takyeef); as well as to negate whatever Allah

¹*Encyclopedia Americana*, International edition, Scholastic Library publishing, Inc. Danbury, Connecticut, 2004, vol. 10, pp. 848-9.

²Ibid.

³*Renaissance*, op. cit., August, 2008, pp. 10-11.

negated for Himself and whatever His Messenger sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam negated for Him; but without distortion (tahreef) or denial (ta’feel).¹

According to the Qur’ān:

(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees.²

So for the case of the Muslim belief in Allah is concerned, it can be summarized as below:

1. Allah, the Most High, is One and Alone. He has no partner in His Lordship (rubaobiyyah), nor in His Divinity (uloohiyyah), nor in His Names and Attributes. He alone is Lord of the worlds, Who deserves that all forms of worship should be directed to Him alone.
2. To direct any form of worship, as; Supplication (du’aa), Seeking succor and help (istigaathah), Seeking aid and assistance (isti’aanah), Vowing (nadhr), Slaughtering (dhabh), Reliance and trust (tawakkul), Reverential fear (khawf), Hope (raja), Love (mahabbah), or other similar acts, to other than Allaah the Most High, constitutes ascribing partners to Allah (shirk)- irrespective of who the worship was

¹Al-‘Aql, Shaykh Naasir, *General Precepts of Ahlus-Sunnah wal Jamaa’ah*, tr. Sharif, Abu ‘Aaliyah Surkheel Ibn Anwar, n.d., 1999, p. 9.

²The Qur’ān, 42:11.

directed to; whether it was an angel, a prophet, a righteous person, or someone other than this.¹

Naturally, belief takes the form of certain acts or deeds which are the necessary outcome of belief. That is:

When this *imān*, in its essence, enters the heart and receives its confirmation from it, then on the very basis of its presence requires two things:

1. Righteous Deeds (*a'māl-i sālih*)
2. Exhorting one another to the truth and exhorting one another to remain steadfast on it (*tawāsi bi al-haqq wa tawāsi bi al-sabr*).²

These righteous deeds have two dimensions; one deals with the individual and the other deals with the whole society, and both of these go together. Thus it can be said that:

All deeds which result once the morals of a person are purified are called righteous deeds. All their bases are found in human nature and intellect, and the *shari'ah* of God has been revealed to guide mankind towards these righteous deeds. Exhorting one another to the truth and exhorting one another to remain steadfast on it relates to one's immediate surroundings. This is an obvious requirement of accepting the truth and is also termed as *amr bi al-ma'rūf* and *nahyi 'an al-munkar* by the Qur'ān, implying the fact that a person should exhort those in his surroundings to what is *ma'rūf* (good) according to human nature and

¹Al-'Aql, Shaykh Naasir, op. cit., p.11.

²Renaissance, op. cit., August, 2008, p. 11.

intellect and forbid them from what is munkar (evil) according to it.¹

Thus faith is a necessary condition for righteous conduct and moral behavior. That is, faith creates righteousness:

Since God is concerned with righteousness, the question arises as to whether faith is enough or whether it must be accompanied by good works. The Epistle of James declared that faith without works is dead....²

It is agreed in most Christian circles that faith comes first but it should be followed by good works. What is important in faith are the elements of trust, confidence, surrender, and submission. If they exist, then it can be assumed that one would wish to do the will of Allah. If Allah wills love for one's neighbor, then love for one's neighbor should be a product of faith. In short one can say three principle elements concur in an act of faith: the internal conviction, the verbal expression, the performance of the prescribed works.

Faith is a belief in the trustworthiness of an idea that has not been proven. Formal usage of the word "faith" is usually reserved for concepts of religion, as in theology, where it almost universally refers to a trusting belief in a transcendent reality (ergo a belief in a spiritual nature and in spiritual immortality), or else in a Supreme Being and said being's role in the order of transcendent, spiritual things.³

¹Ibid.

²*Encyclopedia Americana*, op. cit., pp. 848-9.

³Faith in *Wikipedia*, the free Encyclopedia. March 2007. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faith>>

Thus faith is ‘the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’. The humans do not actually know the reality of things, therefore Allah’s Will has to be understood first. This will is of two types:

- (a) Universal will, through which His intention is carried out. It is not necessary that what is carried out is liked by Him. This type of will means permission, as Allah said: “Had Allah Willed, they would not have fought one against the other, but Allah does whatever He desires,”(2:253) and “if Allah desires to lead you astray, He is your Lord” (11:34), and
- (b) Legal will, which does not necessarily entail the execution of His desire. His Will, in this case, cannot but what He likes, as He said: “Allah wants to forgive you” (4:27).¹

Both of these wills can be understood from these verses of the Qur’ān:

- i. Do they then seek after a judgement of (the Days of) Ignorance? But who, for a people whose faith is assured, can give better judgement than Allah?²
- ii. Is not Allah the wisest of Judges?³

Thus faith has four levels: (1) Knowledge (2) Recording (3) Will (4) Creation⁴. Thus it can be concluded that faith in Islam is called *Imān*. It is a complete submission to the will of Allah which includes belief, profession, and the body’s performance

¹Al- ‘Uthaimin, Shaikh Muhammad as-Saleh, *The Muslim Beliefs*, Tr. Dr. Maneh al-Johani, n.d., p. 9.

²*The Qur’ān*, 5:50.

³Ibid., 95:8.

⁴*The Muslim Beliefs*, op. cit., p. 9.

of deeds. *Imān* has two aspects: (1) Recognizing and affirming that there is one Creator of the universe and only to this Creator is worship due. According to Islamic thought, this comes naturally because faith is an instinct of the human soul. This instinct is then trained via parents or guardians into specific religious or spiritual paths. Likewise, the instinct may not be guided at all. (2) Willingness and commitment to submitting that Allah exists, and to His prescriptions for living in accordance with vicegerency. Moreover, faith in Islam comprises, as defined in the Qur'ān:

O you who believe! Believe in Allah and His Apostle and the Book which has sent down to His Apostle and the Book which He sent down before; and whoever denies Allah and His angels and His books and His apostles and the Last Day has indeed strayed off, far away.¹

Not only is a verbal or mental affirmation of these things required, for the divine call is a call to *imān*, which is not quite what is expressed by the English word “faith”. To have *imān*, to be a *mū'min*, is to be wholeheartedly committed and to be ready to put one’s belief into action.² After having faith a Muslim is required to act on it. As Allah says in the Qur’ān:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, righteousness is rather one who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Book, the apostles, and gives his wealth out of love for Him to the kindred and the orphans and the poor and the wayfarer and the needy and for those in bondage, and establish prayer and pays Zakāt and those who fulfill their promise when they

¹The Qur’ān, 4:136.

²Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, Alhoda publishers and Distributors, London, 1991, pp. 103-4.

make a promise and the patient ones in distress and affliction and in the time of war. These are they who are Truthful and these are they who are the pious.¹

Religion reflects the reality of spiritual hunger within the human soul and the need to find peace with Allah, self, and others. Historian Scott Appleby defines four constituent elements of religion:

The first is a creed, which defines the standard of beliefs concerning the ultimate origin, meaning, and purpose of life. This is generally a body of ideas and teachings called doctrines or dogma. It might also refer to a short confessional statement taken as a first step of conversion and faith. The second is a cultic expression—which encompasses the prayers, devotions, spiritual disciplines, communal worship and ritual, Holy days and seasons, sacred places, religious institutions and sacred objects, and icons. The third is a moral code that defines explicit behavioral norms as well as a fundamental moral vision for the larger society. The fourth is a confessional community, which defines personal and social identity and which provides a supportive context for spiritual growth.²

So far as the faith in God is concerned, man's inner self is satisfied by nothing less than having a Supreme Reality to depend upon. It is this fact which mankind received through

¹*The Qur'ān*, 2:177.

²Cox, Canon Brian, *Faith-Based Reconciliation A Moral vision that Transforms People and Societies*, Xlibris Corporation, America, 2007, p. 24.

the prophets (AS). Therefore this is the common legacy of all mankind.

No Monopoly in Allah's Message:

It is implied in the Qur'ān that all prophets (AS) teach the same message in essentials, especially the belief that there is no god but Allah, and that on the Last Day (Day of Judgement) everyone will be brought before Allah to be judged. The following verses of the Qur'ān describe something which presumably happened before creation¹:

Behold! Allah took the Covenant of the Prophets, saying: "I give you a Book and Wisdom: then comes to you a Messenger, confirming what is with you; do ye believe in him and render, him help". Allah said: "Do ye agree, and take this my Covenant as binding on you?" They said: "We agree."...²

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah) never will it be accepted of him....³

In the verse at the end of this quotation the word Islam appears to have its general sense of "submission to Allah", and thus to be a description of the religion proclaimed by all the prophets (AS), not solely that proclaimed by Muhammad (SAAS).⁴ Therefore, with Islam's all-embracing definition of submission to the will of Allah, those who believe are not limited to Muhammad (SAAS) and the people who received his message, but include everyone who has ever fulfilled the above definition at any point in history. Eminent examples are Noah,

¹*Muslim–Christian encounters*, op. cit., p.11.

²*The Qur'ān*, 3:81.

³Ibid., 3:85.

⁴*Muslim–Christian encounters*, op. cit., p.11.

Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all the prophets (AS) as well as the nations who followed their teachings. Thus, in the Qur'ān one reads that every messenger sent by Allah preached monotheism: "Not a messenger did We send before thee without this inspiration sent by Us to him: that there is no god but I; therefore worship and serve Me."¹ A natural result is that Muslims believe in Allah and all His messages revealed to the prophets (AS) before Muhammad (SAAS) as is mentioned in the Qur'ān:

Say ye: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismā'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: and we submit to Allah."²

Allah, in His infinite wisdom, has sent prophets and messengers to all the nations for their guidance. It, therefore, is mentioned in the Qur'ān:

Verily We have sent thee with truth, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner: and there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them (in the past).³

The call of the Qur'ān is a call to the unity of belief:

The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah—the which We have sent by inspiration to thee—and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus:

¹*The Qur'ān*, 21:25.

²Ibid., 2:136.

³Ibid., 35:24.

namely, that ye should remain steadfast in Religion, and make no divisions therein....¹

It is because of the continuity of the same Truth reminded by the prophets (AS) that the Qur'ān presents itself as a way to reconcile the differences between humankind. The compromise offered by Islam affirms common elements between Judaism and Christianity, and accepts Moses and Jesus Christ (AS) as two of the greatest prophets of all time, sent for guidance of humanity. Islam accepts the virgin birth of Jesus and considers both Mary and Jesus (AS) as chaste and pious. The Qur'ān further, proclaims: "It was We who revealed the Torah (to Moses): therein was guidance and light...."² And at another place it says:

And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light. And confirmation of the Torah that had come before him: A guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah.³

Given this status and possession of the basic message of Allah for mankind, there remains no scope for different 'isms'.

Islam Rejects Racism:

The Qur'ān's assertion of One transcendent God, such a God, beyond gender, color, and personification, makes possible the establishment of a true, universal community among the people on earth. The Qur'ān stresses on the concept of all people as

¹Ibid., 42:13.

²Ibid., 5:44.

³Ibid., 5:46.

children of Adam and Eve.¹ All people stand as equal with each other before Him. The very ideals of Islam based as they are on the worship of One God and on the injunction to humanity to seek unity based on their common creation by that One God—these ideals move people away from the concept of a “chosen race” and of “gentile” and help them, see themselves as equally respected creations of Allah.²

One major hurdle in the way of peaceful co-existence is the false notion of racial superiority. It has already caused a great deal of bloodshed among different human races. Each tribe of the pre-Islamic Arabs claimed the greatest honor for itself on account of its pedigree.³ It is a matter of regret that even some religions that came before the prophethood of Muhammad (SAAS) aggravated the problem of disunity and inequality among mankind by laying down the principles of superiority solely on the basis of birth and religion.⁴ The Qur’ān demolished the age-old structure of social superiority by asserting common origin of all human beings. It recognizes piety as the sole basis of nobility and superiority. Undoubtedly, this concept develops in man an optimistic attitude towards life by inspiring him to attain superiority through noble deeds. It has also made possible the realization of the universal brotherhood of nations. This point is elaborately emphasized in the following verse:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair)
of a male and a female, and made you into
nations and tribes, that ye may know each other

¹Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, USA, 2007, p. 54.

²Ibid.

³See, Najeebabadi, Moulana Akbar Shah, *Tarikh-i Islam* (urdu), vol. I, Farid Book Depot private Ltd., Delhi, p. 73.

⁴Ibid., pp. 76-81.

(not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).¹

Islam rejects racism and preaches alternative criteria for Allah's people. It rejects the notion that Allah is biased or partial to a particular race or tribe, and that His Mercy is locked up to a certain group. With such profound statements in the Qur'ān, Islam was able to wipe out age-old ethnocentric notions of superficial superiority and exclusive nobleness of mankind. Challenging the claims of the egocentric people who claimed that none shall enter paradise unless he belongs to their race and ethnicity, the Qur'ān says: "...Say: "Produce your proof if ye are truthful.""² As to the true criteria for such a qualification, the Qur'ān proclaims: "Nay,—whoever submits his whole self to Allah and is a doer of good,—he will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."³ Islam discredits all kinds of chauvinism, be it racial or religious, because such chauvinism is based on nothing but selfish and idiosyncratic tendencies in the exclusion and lack of respect for others. Islam also insists on the individual being honoured. Almighty Allah says:

We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our Creation.⁴

Almighty Allah has honoured the human beings by making them respectful and not lowly. They were preferred over all

¹The Qur'ān, 49:13.

²Ibid., 2: 111.

³Ibid., 2: 112.

⁴Ibid., 17: 70.

other creatures and were given a distinct position in this world. Allah (SWT) thus gave them faculties to be civilized, to acquire different kinds of knowledge and to achieve development. Allah (SWT) also made opportunities for them on earth and entrusted them with responsibilities that were beyond the capability of other creatures. Almighty Allah says: “We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it....”¹ This honour was provided since birth, as Allah created man from earth and breathed into him of His spirit, then ordered the angels to prostrate to him in honour and respect. Almighty Allah says:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: “I am about to create man from clay: when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in prostration unto him.” So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together.²

Then, soon after that Allah provided man with the knowledge to allow him to make his life and existence according to the way Allah willed them to be as the following verse of the Holy Qur’ān states: “And He taught Adam the names of all things....”³ In spite of all this, man invented different notions on his own. In the field of religion too, he kept himself confined to the tradition which, he thought, was true. This gave rise to the diversity of religious traditions or simply faiths.

Diversity of Faiths:

The phenomenon of religious diversity is one of the questions with which today’s religious thought is faced. The existence of communities in which people of different religious traditions live together and the expansion of social relationships and

¹Ibid., 33: 72.

²Ibid., 38: 71-73.

³Ibid., 2:31.

communication at the threshold of the third millennium are among the reasons for paying attention to this vital issue.¹ The Qur'ān argues for Divine wisdom in human diversity of culture, language, and tribes. The purpose in this diversity is for men and women to cooperate in a life of righteousness and vie with one another in the performance of righteous deeds. Goodness must not be judged, therefore, by ethnic, racial or even religious identity²; because, according to the Qur'ān: "...Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most Righteous of you...."³ Further, Islam is not a barrier for religious coexistence. Thus, the Qur'ān states:

...To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed He would have made you a single People, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.⁴

In other verse the Qur'ān states:

If it had been thy Lord's Will, they would all have believed,—all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!⁵

¹*Islam and Religious Pluralism*, op. cit., p. ii.

²Ayoub, Mahmoud M., "ROOTS OF MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN CONFLICT", *The MuslimWorld*, Mn. Ed., Elizabeth A.D' Amico, The Duncan Black Macdonald center Hartford Seminary, Hartford, USA, 1989, vol. Lxxiv, p. 29.

³*The Qur'ān*, 49:13.

⁴Ibid., 5: 48.

⁵Ibid., 10:99.

An examination of the texts of these two verses makes it clear that diversity is the will of Allah. The text of the aforementioned verses also makes it clear that compulsion in the matters of faith is forbidden which is also corroborated by another verse of the Qur'ān which states: "There is no compulsion in religion...."¹

A critical look of the texts of the verse 5:48 manifests that the purpose of these differences is to test, what we do with the revelations and how we behave with the precepts and teachings of Islam and who strive as in a race in good deeds. Diversity of religions, nations and peoples is a test and the teachings of Islam require that we manage the differences and live a peaceful harmonious life in this world. Thus the Qur'ān states: "...And did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief...."² In other verse the Qur'ān states:

...Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure....³

The teaching of the aforementioned two verses is very significant in the present world context. The ever lasting teachings, the universal dimension of the message of Islam of these two verses are that if there are no differences between people, if power is concentrated in the hands of one group alone, be it one nation or one race the earth would be corrupt because human beings require others to control and limit their irresponsible impulse and behavior for expansion, supremacy and dominance. Verse 22:40 indicates that the scheme of Allah

¹Ibid., 2:256.

²Ibid., 2:251.

³Ibid., 22:40.

is to protect monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques which establishes pluralistic religious nature of Islam.

One must not deduce from this discussion that according to Islam every religion is true, no, it is not like that. However, Islam never intends to disturb the required and essential harmony among people of diverse religious traditions. That is why it includes strong provisions for peace and harmony.

Islam–Peace:

Islam literally means Peace, and is defined as submission to Allah, which means that peace cannot be obtained without total submission to the Lord of the universe. When Qur’ān calls, “Enter Islam wholeheartedly”¹, it does not merely invite its adherents to follow the institutionalized system of Islam; it also signals to them that the real, comprehensive and long lasting peace can be achieved only through total acceptance of the System of Allah. Thus the Qur’ān states that, “the System for you is the (system of) Peace”². And at another place the Qur’ān states: “But Allah doth call to the Home of Peace....”³ Further, at one more place Allah says:

...There hath come to you from Allah a (new) light and a perspicuous Book,—wherewith Allah guideth all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leadeth them out of darkness, by His Will, unto the light,—guideth them to a Path that is Straight.⁴

Therefore, the final Guidance, the last Message, the Qur’ān, is the message filled with peace and prosperity, a bounty of Allah for whole of His creation. But peace in this worldly life does

¹Ibid., 2:208.

²Ibid., 3:19.

³Ibid., 10:25.

⁴Ibid., 5:15-6.

not mean absence of differences it may mean so as for as the case of eternal life in Paradise is concerned. According to Javed Jamil:

In Islam, peace is not just a state of absence of war or chaos in society; it has the broadest and the most comprehensive meaning, in terms of extent, depth and longevity, including all the components of peace...It has to be not just personal, not just family and not just social; it has to be at all the three levels and in the widest discernible sense. At individual level, it does not merely mean peace of mind; it encompasses physical, mental and social health. At family level, it comprises peaceful relationship between husband and wife, between parents and children, and among children themselves. At social level, it does not only indicate absence of war or chaos, it also means absence of all forms of crimes and social tensions, and prevalence of mutual brotherhood and justice. Peace is also not something bound by time or space; it is as much for this world as for Hereafter; peace is eternal. This is to be ensured that Islam's message of Grand peace has to percolate down the lowest strata of society. And this to be done in a way that the world does not feel threatened by the emergence of an institutionalized and political Islam, but learns to apply moral and socio-economic principles of Islam for the benefit of the whole mankind.¹

Peaceful living and peaceful coexistence are at the very center of what Islam enjoins on all Muslims. The Qur'ān is very concerned with bringing an end to tribal, ethnic, and religious

¹Jamil, Dr. Javed, Ed., *Islam, Muslims & the World*, Feb. 2009, Saharanpur, vol. 1, Issue 2, p. 20.

feuds and with promoting peaceful coexistence. So true is this that some Muslims believe the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the US Bill of Rights were influenced by the Qur'ān.¹

The entire history of mankind has been a class struggle between the forces of light and darkness, good and bad, truth and falsehood. The forces of goodness have struggled to bring about an ideal society that is just and balanced both inwardly and outwardly. Unfortunately, more often than not humanity has failed to find that equilibrium, balance and harmony between the outward and the inward, the external and the internal. The ideal that Islam² has been seeking for the past fourteen centuries is also a universal one—the establishment of a just society. Truly, in this pursuit, the mission of Muhammad (SAAS), the prophet of Islam, was very similar to those of all the prophets (AS) and sages that came before him. According to Ibn al-'Arabi:

All the revealed religions [sharā'i'] are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad [SAAS] is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's [SAAS] revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the light of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of

¹*Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, op. cit., p. 64.

²All of the divinely revealed religions are called Islām in the general sense of complete submission to the commands of Allah, while Islām is used in a specific sense to refer to the final version of Islām (in the general sense) brought by Muhammad (SAAS).

all the messengers and all the revealed religions.¹

Islam came as a guiding light into a dark world—a world that needed a lightning bolt to wake up from its deep slumber. It came in an age of truth-defying Ignorance when the worship of one True God from China and Japan in the East to Morocco and Iceland in the West was replaced by worship of myriads of demigods. There were false notions of superiority and egotism on the basis of race, colour, tribe and ethnicity. Islam came to a nation that boasted of its depth of corruption and debauchery in social and moral issues. Historically, Islam came after the fall of the Roman Empire and the collapse of the ‘dark ages’. In the nearby Persian Empire, there was a lot of political bickering for power and in far-away Roman Empire, there were signs of decadence everywhere, and in Arabia, the land that was supposed to reshape the destiny of mankind, its people were devoid of compassion and moral values.² It was in Arabia, at the confluence of the three great continents of Asia, Africa and Europe, that Muhammad (SAAS)—the last prophet of Islam, a Makkian from the illustrious family of the Quraysh, a descendant of the Babylonian Abraham (AS), and the Egyptian Hagar—was born in 570 CE (or 53 BH of the Muslim calendar). And here it was that the Qur’ān was revealed to Muhammad (SAAS) in Arabic when he (SAAS) was 40 years old (in 13 BH). Coming into a world that was stained by corruption and disintegration³, Islam provided a unique pattern that was unknown in the entire history of mankind. It does not mean here that Islam was now born rather Islam was there from first man Ādam. So, therefore, we can say it was the final phase of the Sharī‘ah of Islam which was revealed on Muhammad (SAAS). Islam provided three basic elements—faith in one God (Allah), reform of self and reform of the society at large. Islam remained as a religious commitment, a socio-economic-

¹See *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, op. cit., p. 113.

²See *Tarikh-i Islam*, vol. I, op. cit., pp. 51-82.

³See Ibid., pp. 51-240.

political program, but above all a vehicle for the ‘continuous reform’ of the society. Almighty Allah says:

O ye who believe! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly; and follow not the footsteps of the Satan for he is to you an avowed enemy.¹

It should be noted here that following the call to join peace by advising against following the steps of Satan means that the opposite of peace, i.e. war, is a suggestion of Satan. In order to show the importance of peace in Islam, it is sufficient to know that the term Islam itself is derived from it. It means: following God’s commands and being faithful to worshipping and serving Him; this is referred to as peace. Suffice it also to know that as-Salām is one of the attributes of Allah. Hence, Almighty Allah says:

Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god;—
the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of
Peace (and Perfection), the Guardian of Faith,
the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might,
the Irresistible, the justly Proud glory to Allah!
(high is He) above the partners they attribute to
Him.²

It is quite likely that the use of this name for Allah resides in the peaceful meaning that is being discussed. It also resides in the fact that Almighty Allah is free from imperfection and defect and of being affected by the adversities that affect others like annihilation. Almighty Allah also summons people to the abode of peace as in His saying: “But Allah doth call to the Home of Peace: He doth guide whom He pleaseth to a Way that is straight.”³ The meaning is that of the abode of security, stability, and happiness. Some interpreters of the Holy Qur’ān

¹The Qur’ān, 2:208.

²Ibid., 59:23.

³Ibid., 10:25.

explain the house of peace as paradise. One should also add that Muslims invoke peace at the conclusion of every prayer (*Salah*), and they exchange greetings with the same word. The prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) exalted saying states:

You will not enter paradise until you have faith, and you will not have faith until you love each other. Do you want me to point out to you something that will enable you love each other? Spread Salām (peace) amongst you.¹

Peace, in the meaning given to it by the Islam, does not mean giving in or weakness, it means the securing of one's right. It also means the exchange of relations and services on the basis of equality and mutual respect and also on the basis of agreements which are binding to all parties. Further, faith in Islam has a comprehensive meaning which one must understand and advocate, as it is open to dialogue and discussion. Almighty Allah says in a verse that:

The Messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith, each one (of them) believeth in Allah, His angels, His books, and His Messengers. “We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His Messengers.” And they say: “we hear, and we obey: (we seek) Thy forgiveness, our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys.”²

Noble prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said:

My own standing and that of the prophets before me is like the case of the man who built a house and embellished it except for a brick

¹*Muslim* on the authority of Abu Hurayrah, H. No. 203.

²*The Qur'ān*, 2:285.

corner, which people started to visit and to like and then ask: have you made this brick corner? I am the brick corner and I am the last of the prophets.¹

The word Islam itself in its larger meaning reflects this comprehensiveness in faith, in the same way as Abraham (AS) and Ishmā‘il (AS) said after they had built the foundations of the house as in the Qur’ān:

“Our Lord! Make of us Muslims, bowing to Thy (Will), and of our progeny a people Muslim, bowing to Thy (Will); and show us our places for the celebration of (due) rites; and turn unto us (in Mercy); for thou art the Oft-Relenting Most Merciful.²

It is well known that it is Abraham (AS) who named Muslims as ‘Muslim’. Thus Almighty Allah says: “...It is he [Prophet Abraham (AS)] Who has named you Muslims, both before and in this (Revelation)....”³

So far as the study of Islam as a religion is concerned, it could be possible only through the texts of this religion. Although a Muslim is expected to be an expression of the Islamic teachings, but Islam could not be interpreted (misinterpreted) through the behavior of Muslims. It is so because in the prophet Muhammad’s (SAAS) time and in the first subsequent generation, most of the Muslim community lived according to the precepts of Islam. These are very comprehensive, covering every detail of life-religious observance, family, social, economical, political, cultural, and other aspects of daily life, as well as international, national and tribal relations. As centuries passed, bringing about the expansion of the Muslim

¹Bukhari on the authority of Abu Hurayrah, H. No. 3535.

²The Qur’ān, 2:128.

³Ibid., 22:78.

communities and the tremendous growth of its resources, with various new nations joining the community and bringing with them their different backgrounds, heritages and philosophies, it was inevitable that some differences should develop between the Muslim's behavior and the teachings of Islam. There were individuals, subjects, rulers, and nations whole, though they bore Muslim names acted in ways utterly at odds with the Qur'ānic precepts. Islam prohibits every kind of misbehavior, cheating, treachery, drinking intoxicants and gambling. Alas! How many Muslims nowadays live a life according to these rules?

Although Truth could not be more than one, still Allah has willed that man should choose the right path on his own. For this purpose He bestowed freedom on mankind.

Freedom of Mankind:

Islam teaches that human diversity is a sign of God's mercy and a portent for men of knowledge. Therefore in the Glorious Qur'ān Almighty Allah states: "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours...."¹ Thus, the Qur'ān accepts the reality of difference and diversity within humanity. It gives the impression that diversity is part of the divine plan and recognizes the freedom of choice of mankind. Hence according to the Qur'ān: "If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind One People...."² Further more, the Qur'ān recognizes the legitimate multiplicity of religious convictions and laws, as can be seen from this verse:

...To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given

¹Ibid., 30:22.

²Ibid., 11:118.

you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.¹

But those who are Muslims, believe in Oneness of Allah, are, therefore, told to proclaim:

Say ye: “We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmā‘il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one another of them: and we submit to Allah”.²

Indeed, the secret in allowing difference is that Islam advocates faith which should be based on observation, contemplation and then choice. At the same time Almighty Allah has given the opportunity to those who believe and who perform good deeds to reap requital and recompense, as opposed to those who neither believe nor perform good deeds and who should expect all the punishment that should ensue there from. It should be understood that when Islam allows freedom of faith, it also leaves the final word to difference about it to Almighty Allah who says: “...But Allah will judge between them in their quarrel on the Day of Judgement.”³

The notion of freedom of faith, in the view of Islam, starts out from the idea that religion is both faith and belief. Any personal and inner feeling has to be based on conviction, inclination and ease. This is because adopting Islam means that one has led and submitted himself to Almighty Allah. That it is established on the basis of freedom which Islam considers an important value, as it relates to the nature and innate instincts

¹Ibid., 5:48.

²Ibid., 2:136.

³Ibid., 2:113.

of man. Freedom is one of the basics of human rights and one of the most salient aspects of honoring Allah. We may even say that the expression of honour, as already stated, is nobler than the expression of “human rights” which has become of current use lately. The term ‘rights’ connotes that there is taking and fighting, whereas honoring refers to the generous supply of wealth and favours. The freedom that Almighty Allah has bestow upon man concerns his faith, work, lodging, correspondence, thinking and his expression, which form his personality and are the focus of his life, and which allow him to be productive. This is also the basis of the strong and united society where the sharpness of the struggle is subdued. The notion of struggle is used here in the sense of competition between opposing factions which try to eliminate and replace each other. This kind of fighting is a common human feature and law, which is almost general. The reason is that Islam has turned that into a competition which the Glorious Qur’ān has insisted upon as in the following verse: “...And for this let those aspire, who have aspiration.”¹ The Qur’ān prohibits believers from using abusive language about other religions and faiths:

Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance. Thus have We made alluring to each People its own doings. In the end will they return to their Lord and He shall then tell them the truth of all that they did.²

In this verse the word ‘*Ummah*’ (religious community/ each People) and the word ‘*Zyyanna*’ (beautiful and attractive/ alluring) are used together. It means that Allah made the religious injunctions (*Shari’ah* and *Minhaj*) of each community attractive and appealing to the followers of that community. Therefore, the Qur’ān asks the believers respectfully to tolerate

¹Ibid., 83:26.

²Ibid., 6:108.

other *Sharai'* and *Manahij* and avoid any derogatory language against them. This type of command is used in many other places of the Qur'ān to make sure not only that religious coexistence itself is respected but that the actions and beliefs of each religious community are protected. Hence the non-Muslim subjects under Muslim rule enjoyed such freedom that their educational institutions and their personal law courts were independent and free.¹

Naturally, such a freedom could work only when there is enough choice for man to choose his faith. This brings to light the freedom of religious belief.

Freedom of Religious Belief:

The freedom of religious belief is claimed to have been preached in Islam. The Qur'ān prohibits forced religious conversion and any hindrance to religious freedom. Hence, the Qur'ān states:

There is no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects Tagut² and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.³

Advising Muhammad (SAAS), who was very concerned that the Makkans accept Islam, Allah (SWT) tells him: "If it had been Allah's Will, they would not have taken false gods: but We made thee not one to watch over their doings, nor art thou set over them to dispose of their affairs."⁴ The Qur'ān, upholding religious freedom as a way of Almighty Allah that must be respected, says: "If it had been thy Lord's Will, they

¹See *Tarikh-i Islam*, op. cit., vol's. I, II, III.

²'Tagut' here means; anything worshipped besides Allah.

³*The Qur'ān*, 2:256.

⁴Ibid., 6:107.

would all have believed,—all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!”¹ And in addition at another place it says:

Say, “The Truth is from your Lord” let him who will believe, and let him who will, reject (it): for the wrong-doers We have prepared a Fire whose (smoke and flames), like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in: if they implore relief they will be granted water like melted brass, that will scald their faces, how dreadful the drink! How uncomfortable a couch to recline on!²

Allah’s Plan is to use the human will to co-operate in understanding Him and His relations to us. This is the answer to an objector who might say: “If He is All-powerful, why does sin or evil exist in the world? Can He not destroy it?” He can, but His Plan is different, and in any case it is not for a prophet to force any one to accept the truths which he is inspired to preach and proclaim.

It is to this extent that the Qur’ān views the religions other than Islam.

The Qur’ānic view of Other Religions:

The Qur’ān not only declares that each and every people have been provided with the Divine guidance but also insists on this essential message being one and the same in all cases, and makes no difference between the various prophets who bore it. But one must remember the general foundation, according to Islam, is that the religion of all messengers is the same, but their legislations vary. All are inspired by Almighty Allah. One of the basics of faith in Islam is to believe that all creeds and

¹Ibid., 10:99.

²Ibid., 18:29.

religions are one and the same in terms of monotheism, prophethood, resurrection, and comprehensive belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgement and fate whether good or bad. All religions agree in bringing good tidings and strict warnings, in giving definite proof and showing the right way and bringing people out of utter darkness into light by refining the souls through an overflowing belief in Allah and obedience, purifying them and correcting any deviation from the truth and judging according to Allah's revelations. This basic notion is the essence of all messages, i.e., Unity of religion and creed in the messages of all prophets and messengers. Muslims believe that religions are one in origin. Allah sent all prophets and messengers with this same religion, their missions and their ways are in agreement concerning it. What is at variance is the number of different legislations branching out of that religion. Allah has chosen His prophets and messengers as intermediaries between Him and His worshipers to introduce and explain His religion to the latter, let them know what is good and what is bad for them and to fully realize what serves them best in their lives and in their return to Him. All prophets and messengers carried the message of the comprehensive religion, which is the worship of Allah alone. They called for worshipping Allah alone and holding fast to His firm creed. Their mission was to guide people to it and to explain to the people how they would be once they get there. Their work was calling people to Allah, the Most Sublime, by proving and affirming that He is the only Allah, and inviting them to worship Him alone, with no partner, and to renounce the worship of anything else. The worship of one Allah is the true religion of the whole world from the time of Adam until the last soul that lives on earth. Since the origin of religion is one, which is Islam, and only legislations vary, the prophet (SAAS) says in verified traditions, "We prophets, share the same religion," "prophets are brothers of different mothers and the same father,". The religion of all these prophets is the same; it is the worship of Allah alone with no partner. He is worshipped at all times, by

doing what is ordained at a particular time, which constitutes the religion of Islam at that time. Therefore, a person who disbelieved in the creed of Moses (AS) before it was repealed was not a Muslim. Likewise, a person who fails to believe in the creed of Muhammad (SAAS) once it has superseded all other messages and messengers, is not a Muslim. It was ordained for none of the prophets (AS) at all to worship a deity other than Allah. Thus the chapter 16 verse 36 allude to the universal provision of the Divine guidance as: “For We assuredly sent amongst every People a Messenger, (with the Command), “Serve Allah, and eschew Evil”....”¹ Furthermore, the 84th verse of the 3rd chapter says,

Say: “We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismā‘il; Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets from their Lord: we make no distinction between one another among them, and to Allah do we bow our will (in Islam).”²

The 25th verse of the 21st chapter of the Qur’ān says, “Not a messenger did We send before thee without this inspiration sent by Us to him: that there is no god but I; therefore worship and serve Me.”³ And 152nd verse of the 4th chapter of the Qur’ān says, “To those who believe in Allah and His messengers and make no distinction between any of the messengers, We shall soon give their (due) rewards: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.”⁴

These verses affirm the belief in the unanimity of all the prophets. The verses from 84 to 91 of the 6th chapter and from 23 to 53 of the 23rd chapter speak of a continuous theme of the

¹Ibid., 16:36.

²Ibid., 3:84.

³Ibid., 21:25.

⁴Ibid., 4:152.

concurrence and brotherhood of all the prophets (AS) send to the different sections of mankind, and the unity of the essential message brought by them. Not only this, but the Qur'ān makes it obligatory to believe in all the prophets (AS) and condemns those as non-believers who differentiate among them and believe in some and reject others. The verses 150 to 152 of the 4th chapter clearly state, the Qur'ānic stand-point, in this regard. There are many more verses that can be added to the above quoted verses which elucidate this subject in the same strain.

However, Islam recognizes the other religions only to the extent that whether they confirm the basic truth brought by the prophets (AS) which was lastly brought by Muhammad (SAAS).

Islam's recognition of Other Religions:

Before Islam, world religions were at war with each other. Jews and Christians rejected each other violently. Their mutual persecution is documented in many books of Judeo-Christian history. Islam's unique contribution to human civilization is its recognition of the presence of other religions and its acceptance of the need to live in peace with those religions. Ismā'il R. al-Faruqi, confirming this fact, says,

The respect with which Islam regards Judaism and Christianity, their founders and scriptures, is not a courtesy, but an acknowledgement of religious truth. Islam sees them in the world not as "other views" which it has to tolerate, but as standing *de jure*, as truly revealed religions from God. Moreover their legitimate status is neither socio-political, nor cultural, nor civilizational, but religious.¹

¹Al-Faruqi, Isma'il R., *Islam and Other Faiths*, Ataullah Siddiqui, Ed., Islamic Foundation, UK, 1998, p.74.

The Qur'ānic view of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* should be understood accordingly.

The Qur'ānic Concept of *Ahl al-Kitāb*:

This concept reveals and encourages the further development of special and intimate relations among Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The Qur'ān uses the word ‘*Ahl al-Kitāb*’ (people of the Book) specifically of Jews and Christians. But the objective is to remind not only Jews and Christians but Muslims too that their religious heritage is shared and that their religious roots are similar. The Qur'ān addresses prophet Muhammad (SAAS):

Say: “O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than Allah.” If then they turn back, say ye: “Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will).”¹

The shared heritage here is the concept of One Transcendent Allah and the obligation to obey certain rules in following Him. This also includes the *Sābi'ūn*. The word *Sābi'ūn* occurs three times in the Qur'ān (2:62; 5:69; 22:17) and that along with the Jews and the Christians, pointing out, according to some Muslim scholars, that they belong to the *Ahl al-Kitāb* category, though others oppose it. Almost all the classical commentators on the Qur'ān, including the earliest ones such as al-Tabari have left the identification of *al-Sābi'ūn* vague. Al-Tabari, noting the differing opinions of the Companions (RA) of the prophet (SAAS), and of the Successors, identifies *al-Sābi'ūn* with the people who do not adhere to any traditional

¹*The Qur'ān*, 3:64.

religion, but are monotheist and claim to be the possessors of revelation from God.¹ The suggestions given for the definition of *al-Sābi’ūn* are as follows:

- (1) a group of people belonging to the category of “Ahl al-Kitab” (the people of the Divine Writ).
- (2) a group of people known as the followers of Noah;
- (3) a group of people falling in between the Jews and the Christians;
- (4) a group of people falling in between the Christians and the Majūs;
- (5) a group of people falling in between the Jews and the Majūs;
- (6) a group of people who neither belong to the Jewish faith, nor to the Christian, nor to the Majūs, but believe in Tawhid (Monotheism) and do not have any revealed book or a specific religious law (Shari‘ah);
- (7) a group of people who are monotheist and hold al-Zabūr (Psalms of David) as their Scripture;
- (8) a group of people who are monthesist [monotheist] and worship angels;
- (9) a group of people who are monotheist and worship stars; and
- (10)a group of people who are dualists but do not have any Scripture.²

All these various definitions are held by different scholars of Muslims and, *al-Sābi’ūn*, therefore, have a different status in

¹Aasi, Ghulam Haider, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions—A Study of Ibn Hazm’s Kitāb al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Nihāl*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Islamabad, Pakistan, 1999, p. 189.

²Ibid., pp. 189-90.

the sight of Muslim scholars. Hence have a special consideration as far as the Muslim State is concerned.

When Isma'il R. al-Faruqi was asked this question whether Jews and Christians should be called ‘infidels’ in Islam, he explained that the term ‘infidel’ is applied to a person who does not recognize Allah at all. It should not, he said, be applied to the adherent of another religion who believes in Allah.¹ Al-Faruqi further said that no Jews and Christians may be called ‘infidel’ a priori. However, if he or she denies Allah or Allah’s unity and His transcendence, he/she may be called so.² At the time of the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) Jews and Christians were considered to have incorrect belief, yet despite such incorrect beliefs Allah will not deny them their appropriate rewards. In two verses of the Qur’ān reward is even promised to the *Sābi‘ūn*, who many commentators agree were star worshipers provided they believe in Allah, the Qur’ān, and the Last Day and do good:

Those who believe (in the Qur-ān). And those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians,—any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.³

Those who believe (in the Qur-ān). Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians,—any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness,—on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.⁴

¹*Islam and Other Faiths*, op. cit., p. 74.

²Ibid., p. 75.

³*The Qur’ān*, 2:62.

⁴Ibid., 5:69.

However, the *Ahl al-Kitāb* are not the only religious groups that live on earth. There are other groups as well for whom clear guide lines were provided by prophet Muhammad (SAAS) that has come down to us.

Religions other than *Ahl al-Kitāb*:

The use of the term ‘*Ahl al-Kitāb*’ or ‘People of the Holy Books’ and ‘Book People’ by Islam to refer to non-Muslims who live with Muslims in the same society proves that Muslims recognize the Holy Books and the Messengers upon whom they were revealed. There are some called ‘the people of protection’ or ‘protégés’ (*ahl al-dhimma* or *dhimmis*), i.e. the people of the covenant, peace and security. This is a name that has a wider meaning than the People of the Holy Books, because it includes the religions of the Holy Books as well as other religions and which were known and recognized, as the Magians, Samaritans and Sabians. It is related that some Muslims told ‘Umar ibn Khattab (RA) about some people who worshipped fire and they were neither Jews, nor Christians nor People of the Holy Books. This caused a problem for ‘Umar (RA). Then ‘Abd ur-Rahman bin ‘Auf (RA) said: “I was witness to the Messenger of God when he said, ‘Deal with them as you deal with the Peoples of the Holy Books’.”¹ It is also related that the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) accepted the tribute (*Jizyah*) from the Magians of Hajar without allowing the consumption of the meats they had slaughtered or marriage with their women. Then when Khalid bin Walid (RA) was Abu Bakr’s (RA) governor, he required it from the People of Iraq, who were Persian, in a correspondence to their provincial governor. Afterwards, ‘Umar ibn Khattab (RA) accepted it from them, and after him, ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan also accepted it,

¹Ibn Ibrahim, Abu Yusuf Yaqoob, *Kitab al-Kharaj*, Salafiyyah Edition, Egypt, 1347 H., p. 74.

and also from the Berbers, who were Magians.¹ Ibn Qudāma mentions that:

Al-Nakha‘i, al-Sha‘bi and ashāb al-ra‘y say: “His (i.e. the Zoroastrian’s) blood-money is like the blood-money of a Muslim, because he is a free and inviolable human being, akin to a Muslim”.²

According to Muhammad Legenhausen:

...We cannot definitively rule that the followers of religions other than Judaism, Christianity and Islam are not “People of the Book”, because it is impossible to determine that the original teachings contained in these religions were not brought by a prophet of Allah. The divergence between the content of their scriptures and teachings from those of Islam do not prove that the original teachings were not in essence the same. For although the scriptures and teachings of Christianity are inconsistent with those of Islam, this is explained by the erosion (tahrif) of the original teachings, and there is no reason why a similar strategy could not be used to

¹Ibn Jafar, Qudamah, *Al-Kharaj wa Sin’at al-Kitabah*, n.d., p. 225. (authenticated by Muhammad Hossein Az-Zubaydi, publication of the Ministry of Culture and Information, Dar Annashr Arrashid, Iraq, 1981. In addition, it is related in *Al-Bukhari* and in *At-Tirmidhi* that the prophet (SAAS) took the Tribute from the *Magians of Hajar*. It is also related in *At-Tirmidhi* that he (SAAS) took it from the *Magians of Bahrain*; and that ‘Umar (RA) took it from the Persians; and that ‘Uthman (RA) took it from the Persians and the Berbers).

²Ibn Qudāma, *al-mughni*, Cairo, 1990, vol. 12, p. 55. (*wa qāla al-Nakha‘I wa al-Sha‘bi wa ashāb al-ra‘y: diyatuhu ka-diyat al-muslim li-annahu ādami hurr ma’sūm fa-ashbaha al-muslim*)

explain the possibility that non-Abrahamic religions might be divinely revealed religions.¹

We may discuss and try to find out whether or not religions which were prevalent during the time of Muhammad (SAAS) are having revealed scriptures or messages and whether or not they were actually descended from any prophet but at the same time we must remember that the religions or faiths or ideologies which came after the prophethood of Muhammad (SAAS) have no basis according to Islam and therefore, have no scope for discussion on their legitimacy. Moreover, whatever the religion or faith whether Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism or anything else they are now not to be followed, according to Islam. Because by the coming of final messenger and final guide that is the Qur'ān all the previous messages or guidances are now abrogated. Hence only the final messenger and the message which he came with are to be followed, according to Islam.

In dealing with religious traditions, al-Mas'ūdi applies a two-fold typology and they are:

- (i) those which have a more or less clear concept of God, the prophethood, and the scriptures and have institutionalized the places of worship, and
- (ii) those which have no articulated religious principles, divine laws and a hierarchy of systematic religious administration. In the first category are included the major religions—Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Buddhism. On the pattern of Sābi'ūn of Iraq, he identifies Hinduism and Buddhism in the category

¹*Islam and Religious Pluralism*, op. cit., p.166.

of Sābi'ūn (Sabaeans). This extension of Sābi'ūn to the Hindus and especially the Buddhists could later be adopted by both Ibn Hazm and al-Shahrastāni. In the second category which he calls Jāhilliyah (religious traditions steeped in ignorance) are included peoples such as Turkic, Germanic and African tribes (Rūs, Saqālibah, etc.).¹

There is confusion among scholars and general people alike as to the meaning of the words ‘*Kafir*’, ‘*Kuffar*’, ‘*Kafara*’, ‘*Kafaru*’, ‘*Yakfuru*’ which are commonly misunderstood both by Muslims and non-Muslims alike as being disbeliever, infidels or miscreants. But the word has also been used in the Qur’ān in the sense of deny, deniers, denial, denied. Verse 28 of the 3rd chapter states: “Let not the Believers take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than Believers....”²

Arabic notion of ‘*Kufr*’ or ‘*Kafir*’ has often been mistranslated. Etymologically the general meaning of ‘*Kafir*’ could be rendered as a denier with a veiled heart, veiled, shut off in their hearts to the extent that they deny the presence of the Creator. The dictionary meaning of ‘*Kufr*’ also includes hide and cover up. Further more, according to Rafiq Zakaria, Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, the greatest poet-philosopher, affirmed that Hindus could not be considered as ‘*Kafirs*’ as they believe in the supremacy of God.³ But ‘*Kafir*’ may also indicate one who denies the evidence of the truth as is apparent in the revelation. *Iblis* knew the existence of Allah as he spoke to Him, but he refused to obey. Thus the Qur’ān states:

¹Aasi, Ghulam Haider, op. cit., p. 37.

²The Qur’ān, 3:28.

³Rafiq Zakaria, *Indian Muslims where have they gone wrong?*, Popular Prakashan and Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, September 2004, p. 246.

And behold, We said to the angels: “Bow down to Adam:” and they bowed down: Not so Iblis: he refused and was haughty: He was of those who reject Faith [Iblis thus became a denier].¹

It would be pointless to say that *Iblis*, who had a dialogue with Allah *Subhanahu Wa Ta ‘āla*, did not believe in Him. This is neither logical nor a consistent translation. So to apply the term ‘*Kafir*’ to Jews and Christians is justified as they do not recognize the Qur’ān as the last revealed book. they deny (*Yakfuru*) the truth of the message and its prophet (SAAS), but this does not mean we call them miscreants in the sense that their faith in Allah is not recognized, which would be an inaccurate assertion.² Therefore, it is apparent that the scholars do not feel it appropriate to call Jews, Christians, Hindus etc. as *Kafirs* because they do not deny the existence of Almighty Allah. They are, of course, non-Muslims, hence, can be called as *Kāfir*’s linguistically.

This non-*Ahl al-Kitāb* group also includes the Indian religious communities who profess multiple religious traditions with a profound similarity.

Indian Religions:

There is no doubt that Allah (SWT) sent prophets (AS) to people of India. But there is no mention of any Indian prophet or scripture in Holy Qur’ān. There are some books, written by Muslims who tell that Ādam (AS) was sent down in India and lived herein, and from here his offspring spread throughout the world. Therefore human beings are called ‘Ādāmī’ (attributing to Adam).³ There are many Muslim scholars according to

¹The Qur’ān, 2:34.

²Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, p. 206.

³See for instance, Bilgrami, Ghulam Ali Azad, *Sabhatul Marjan fi Athari Hindustan*, Bombay, n.d., p. 2.

whom Hindu deities like Ram Chandra and Krishna should be taken with respect and they should not be blasphemed because they might have been prophets or righteous persons.

Ibn Hazm¹ considers the Brahmins as deists and regards the religious traditions of India and the Far East in general as a corrupted form of the religion of Sabaeans.² Some Sufis have speculated that the sacred texts of Hinduism were based on divinely revealed scripture, and yet others have advanced the hypothesis that the Buddha was the prophet Dhū al-Kifl.³

In response to the suggestion that the Hindus should be viewed by Muslims as similar to the Arab Qur'aish polytheists (*mushrikin*) of the prophet's (SAAS) time, and hence must be regarded as enemies, Waris Mazhari replies as:

I completely disagree with this. While the Hindus and the pre-Islamic Qur'aish could be said to be both *mushrikin*, the commandments (*ahkam*) related to both are quite different. This is because the context is so different in the two cases. The Qur'aish were violently opposed to Islam and the Muslims. They launched several bloody wars against the Prophet and his companions. The commandments in the Qur'ān and the Hadith about the polytheists, such as warning Muslims to shun them or consider them as enemies, must be seen as related to the context. At a time when the life of the Prophet and the future of his mission were under grave

¹Ibn Hazm was a Muslim scholar and writer of eleventh century.

²See Abū Muhammad ‘Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Sa‘id ibn Hazm, *Kitab al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al- Ahwā’ wa al-Nihāl*, Cairo: al-Matba‘ah al-Adabiyyah, 1317-1321 A.H. / 1899-1903, pt.1, pp. 34-48, 69-78, 113-116.

³See Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, “Islam and the Encounter of Religions” in *Sufi Essays*, 2nd ed., Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 123-151.

and violent threat, naturally such strictures had to be imposed and followed. However, the case of the Hindus today is entirely different. As a community, the Hindus are not violently opposed to Islam, although some individual Hindus undoubtedly are. Further, even those Hindus who are vehemently opposed to Islam do not pose a threat to its very existence, as was the case with the Qur'aish when Muhammad launched his mission, since Islam is now a well-established global religion. Then again, while the early Muslims had to suffer religious persecution, in India today Muslims, like other people, enjoy religious freedom. This suggests that although both the pre-Islamic Qur'aish and the Hindus could be considered to be mushrikin in religious terms, the rules that govern relations between Muslims and them must be different. In contrast to their relations with the pre-Islamic Qur'aish, Muslims need to relate to the Hindus through dialogue. We need to build relations of friendship, and work with them on issues of common concern....¹

Similarly there are the religions like Buddhism and Jainism in India and their founders are considered to be Sidhartha Goutama or Gautama Buddha and Maha Vira, they too must not be defamed because may be they were prophets of Allah or some pious persons and if not still it will create an atmosphere where every one will abuse the respectful personalities of other faiths which is prohibited for Muslims as per the clear guidelines of the Qur'ān are concerned. But, in the sight of Muslims, as far as Sikhism, Bahaiism and Qadiyanism etc. are

¹Waris Mazhari, "Hindu-Muslim Relations and Intra-Muslim Sectarian Disputes in India", in svAbhinava, 2009. 15 Dec. 2009, <<http://www.svabhinava.org/MeccaBenares/YoginderSikand/WarisMazhariHinduMuslim-frame.php>>

concerned, there founders surely were not prophets or righteous persons. Because, according to them (Muslims), prophet Muhammad (SAAS) is the last prophet and messenger of Allah. Nevertheless, adherents of all these faiths or religions need not be expelled from the platform of dialogue rather they too are included in it and tried to be understood and at the same time they are to be made understand what Islam is. Islam gives clear guide lines to engage all the religious communities in meaningful and cordial dialogue. This also sets and assigns the basic role which the Muslims are expected to play among the mankind and for the mankind.

CHAPTER II

Preliminary Discourse – II

Contemporary life is characterized by a “time-space compression” that is evidenced by inexpensive air travel and the ever-present use of telephones, faxes, and, more recently, e-mail and Social Networks. Television access is increasingly widespread even if sets are not owned by individual households. The world is not just becoming the same; it is also becoming more pluralistic. It is almost exclusively under this meaning of globalization that religion appears as part of the process rather than as either irrelevant bystander or victim.¹ Furthermore, according to Klaus Schwab:

The remarkable feeling of proximity between people and nations is the unmistakable reality of our globalized world. Encounters with other peoples’ ways of life, current affairs, politics, welfare and faiths are more frequent than ever. We are not only able to see other cultures more clearly, but also to see our differences more sharply. The information intensity of modern life has made this diversity of nations part of our every day consciousness....²

The term globalization is of quite recent provenance. It first appeared in the business and sociological literature of the 1980s, but by the end of the century it had become a broadly invoked expression in both academic and popular discourse around the world. Along the way, it has acquired a variety of

¹*Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition, Lindsay Jones, Ed., Thomson Gale, U.S.A., 2005, vol. 5, p. 3498.

²Klaus Schwab in Dr. John J. DeGioia, Ed., *Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue*, World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland, 2008, p.4.

meanings that it is well to understand at the outset. They share the common element implied in the word: all parts of the world are becoming increasingly tied into a single, globally extended social unit.¹

Globalization in its literal sense is the process of transformation of local or regional things or phenomena into global ones. It can also be used to describe a process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and function together. This process is a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political forces. Globalization is often used to refer to economic globalization, that is, integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, and the spread of technology. Globalization, the process by which the experience of every day life, marked by the consumption of commodities and ideas is becoming standardized around the world, especially since the late 20th century.² Therefore Mohamed Talbi says:

Instead of wasting our time in drawing caricatures of each other, from now on we must work together in a spirit of complementarity, and learn to manage our points of agreement....³

S. Cromwell Crawford has expressed it as follows:

Global ethics starts with the assumption that as human beings we are already involved in global society, whether we know it or not; whether we

¹*Encyclopedia of Religion*, op. cit., p. 3497.

²*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropaedia, Ready Reference*, 15th edition, London, 2007, vol. 5, p. 3040.

³Mohamed Talbi, 'Is Cultural and Religious Co-existence Possible?', *Encounters Journal of Inter-cultural Perspectives*, Islamic Foundation, UK, vol. 1, No. 2, September 1995, p. 83.

like it or not. Biologically, we all belong to “a single, common biological species”, and therefore we all share several common features. Ecologically, we are part of the planet’s biosphere and are rooted in the earth’s material and energy systems. Historically, in matters of language, religion, arts and technologies, the separate wells from which we drink are all fed by subterranean streams. Culturally, we are multinational and the whole world is becoming a melting pot. Spiritually, increasing numbers have embarked upon the road of self-discovery through inter-faith dialogue.¹

Dialogue:

Dialogue means conversation, to speak alternately. A conversation carried on between two or more persons. Verbal interchange of thought between two or more persons. To enter into dispute, and dialogue with him. In politics, discussion or diplomatic contact between the representatives of two nations, groups, or the like; hence generally, valuable or constructive discussion or communication.² In its widest sense dialogue is described as the recorded conversation of two or more persons particularly as an element in drama or fiction. As a literary form ‘it is a carefully organized exposition by means of invented conversation of contrasting philosophical or intellectual attitude’.³ The oldest known dialogues are from Sophron of Syracuse (5th century BC) called Sicilian mimes which have not survived, yet Plato knew and admired them. Plato’s own dialogues are a landmark in history which are philosophical, sufficiently original and made an impact upon

¹S. Cromwell Crawford, *World Religions and Global Ethics*, Paragon House, New York, 1989, pp. xiii-xiv.

²*The Oxford English dictionary*, Second edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, vol. IV, p. 601.

³*Encyclopaedia of Britannica*, London, 1992, vol. 4, p. 63.

the later forms of it. In the 17th and 18th centuries new tone and function influenced English and French dialogues. During Renaissance interest in Plato got revived who was imitated and adopted by new writers and thinkers like Juan de Valdes of Spain and Torquato Tasso of Italy. In the later times the interest is specially found in George Berkeley who propounds philosophical ideas in three dialogues between Hylas and Philonous (1713), Walter Savage Landors, Imaginary Conversation (1828-29) and George Santayna's, Dialogues in Limbo (1925) also attained fame.¹

Therefore dialogue is described as a conversation, a discussion between two persons or representatives of two groups. The idea behind this verbal exercise is to come to a common ground, encourage understanding, resolve issues and chart out future courses. The term 'interfaith dialogue' refer to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions (i.e. 'faiths') and spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional level with the aim of deriving a common ground in the belief through a concentration on similarities between faiths, understanding of values, and commitment to the world. In Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue, Dr. John J. DeGioia writes:

The term "dialogue" carries several meanings, including every day conversation among neighbors, structured negotiations between labour and management, theological and philosophical exchanges among scholars and religious leaders, and debates among activists and community leaders....Dialogue...includes communication among leaders and citizens in civil society, as well as at state and international levels....It is also a means to articulate ends,

¹Ibid., p. 63.

means and values, as well as to listen and to learn. It is a way to persuade others of the rightness of one's cause and to build coalitions around common, practical projects. Dialogue can be transformative. It can promote new perspectives that either ease or exacerbate conflict—not in isolation, but in combination with broader political, economic and social forces.

...Dialogue as the exchange of ideas oriented to action involves communication among individuals and groups, public and private, religious and secular. Such exchanges may include face-to-face encounters or an exchange of views at a distance. They engage a variety of participants, including religious leaders and elected officials, civil servants, representatives of non-governmental organizations, scholars, members of the professions of law and medicine, the business community and other citizens.

Over time, dialogue within and across these groups has the potential to increase knowledge and understanding, build relationships, establish trust and foster collaboration.¹

This discerns that dialogue is used as literary form to express ideas related to various fields—philosophy, politics, psychology. In the present times its connotations have been extended. It employs conversation, interaction and discourse both verbal and written among the persons or groups to make free interchange of their different views, opinions and discussions. In the present times when the crises of nuclear power struggle

¹*Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue*, op. cit., pp. 10,13.

and civilizational hegemonies become a threat, dialogue between the nations, religions, or civilizations is greatly needed to establish all-round peace and harmony in the world. Globalization that has become now a special pursuit for socio-economic development and inter-cultural exchange, too, can not work properly without the promotion of dialogue.

Islam, as its adherents claim, is a religion of peace, harmony and fellow-feelings and as such in this strife-torn world it permits that people of different regions and different faiths need to talk. For Allah Almighty in His infinite mercy has granted human beings the faculty of reasoning that distinguishes them from other creatures. Sharing knowledge, advising each other, striving to improve and to set priorities right is a religious obligation that can only be achieved through discussions and reasoning. People must teach others around them and give them good advice and exhort them to virtuous deeds and prevent them from evil deeds. The people must learn good deeds from around them. The learned are the leaders who can guide on bringing about mutual understanding, peaceful co-existence, interrelations and co-operations among human beings and to replace disputes, crises and wars with these things. By this appeal one is graciously directing mankind to establish a human society on the basis of knowing each other interrelationships, and making it a better place to live. Almighty Allah in the Qur'ān says:

O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you....¹

¹*The Qur'ān*, 49:13.

Furthermore, Almighty Allah says: "...Help ye one another in righteousness and piety...."¹. The above verses tell us that human beings are equal and the only difference between them in the sight of Allah is on the basis of righteous deeds. And they are told to help one another in the deeds of righteousness and piety. One can become aware of the good deeds if he is told by somebody regarding them and can have a better understanding of that by indulging in conversation with someone. Furthermore, William Montgomery Watt says:

Dialogue may be conducted with varying degrees of formality and informality. Even one like myself who over many years has been engaged in the academic study of another religion, may be said to be involved in an inner dialogue. The essential condition of dialogue is that the participants should meet as equals, and also that, while each side should be committed to its own religion, it should feel that it may have some thing to receive as well as to give. The aim of dialogue is that each party should gain a better understanding of the others religion; but experience shows that in so doing they are likely to gain deeper insights into their own beliefs.

Some Christians may feel that to engage in dialogue is to avoid the command of Christ to proclaim the gospel to every creature; and some Muslims may have a corresponding feeling. Yet such feelings are basically mistaken. In dialogue one is witnessing to one's faith, and this is a way of proclaiming it. In some cases it may be a more effective way of proclaiming one's faith than the traditional methods. In

¹Ibid., 5:2.

effect, one is saying, “I have found something good and I would like to share it with you”. That is to say, one is bearing witness to the positive values of one’s faith, but is doing so without comparing it with other faiths to their disadvantage. After witness has been born in this way, however, it must be left to the hearers to respond to the witness in their own terms.

As the religions look towards the future in this emerging one world in which they have to live together, most of their members will be hoping that amicable forms of coexistence will be discovered.¹

Therefore, dialogue means deliberation and conversation between individuals and groups. The goal of dialogue is not to eliminate differences of opinion and conviction, but to gain understanding and acceptance of differences. Dialogue is not about seeking the defeat of other parties or about silencing them, but about learning, understanding, and increasing one’s knowledge of those “others”. In the book of *Sulh* in *Al-Bukhārī* there are many *Aḥādīth* that encourage reconciliation and bridge building between individuals, groups, and nations. Furthermore, the word “dialogue” is derived from two roots: “dia” meaning “across” or “through” and “logos” meaning “conversation” or “word”. Webster’s dictionary simply defines dialogue as a conversation between two or more people. In the Qur’ān, the closest word for dialogue would be “*Yuhāwir*”, in 18:34, 18:37, 58:1, where it is used for conversation between two people or groups of people. More generally in Islamic tradition, conversation between individuals, between groups and between faiths is seen as key to better living. The prophet Muhammad (SAAS) did not hesitate to listen to others,

¹William Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian encounters Perceptions and misperceptions*, Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane London EC4P 4EE and Routledge 29 west 35th street New York, NY 10001, 1991, p. 144.

whether to idol worshippers, to people of the book or to fellow Muslims. Muslim *Ummah* is required to hold dialogues with followers of other faiths, in implementation of the divine commandment:

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.¹

Dialogue is a means by which false slanders and false acquisitions against Islam can be refuted and marginalize the forces which fabricate them and incite and induce people of them. Dialogue will also describe those people as enemies of civilizations. In the fore front is the introduction of the Islamic principles to non-Muslims, removal of suspicions against it and correction of the wrong notions and conceptions about Islam. Messages of all prophets from Adam (AS) to Muhammad (SAAS), were sent with one content and one meaning, that is the call to worship Allah alone not to associate with Him in worshipping. The initiative for the Muslim-Christian-Jew dialogue was taken by the Muslims under Allah's order:

Say: "O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among our selves, lords and patrons other than Allah". If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)."²

The Qur'ānic excerpts provide the scope of the dialogue. The key to salvation is, 'believe in Allah and His Messengers'. This statement is in total harmony with this biblical formula for salvation:

¹*The Qur'ān*, 16:125.

²Ibid., 3:64.

Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.¹

Muslims believe in all the prophets (AS) sent by God and they make no distinction between them. They believe in Moses (AS) and Jesus (AS) too. If the followers of other faiths do not believe in Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), this need not make the dialogue a non-starter. The prophet Muhammad (SAAS) agreed to make the changes demanded by the Quraish delicately in the draft of the treaty of Hudaibiyah. The phrase, ‘Muhammad the messenger of Allah’, was changed to ‘Muhammad son of ‘Abdullah’ and this change was tolerated in the interest of peace.

Muslims and Christians and Jews believe in one Allah and that is a sufficient reason for these communities to come together to make the earth a heaven of peace and holiness. When Christianity, Judaism and Islam claim to be Abrahamic faiths, they should ensure that their attitude to Allah does not deviate from Abraham’s attitude to Allah: “Look unto Abraham your father.”² What role Allah has played in Abraham’s life is described artistically and in a binary manner in the Qur’ān:

...the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds; who created me, and it is He who guides me; who gives me food and drink, and when I am ill, it is He who cures me; who will cause me to die, and then to live (again); and who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on the Day of Judgement.³

¹*Bible 2 chronicles*, 20:20.

²*Isaiah*, 51:2.

³*The Qur’ān*, 26:77-82.

According to the Bible, in six days the Lord made heaven and earth.¹ The Qur'ān also states: "Your Guardian Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days...."² These two excerpts are enough to show that the followers of the Bible, Old Testament and the Qur'ān have one and the same God to reckon with. Therefore, they should join hands and close ranks to glorify him. Abbās Al-Jirārī explains the Islamic concept behind dialogue as:

Dialogue, conducted on...Islamic basis, is the ideal way for attaining truth. However, when we reflect—in the light of what it affords—on the present state of life and of humanity, we are led to conclude that it is necessary to establish understanding, strength, cooperation, and narrow the gap (stemming from differences) between people.³

Dialogue is a bridge building effort to promote respect, tolerance and peaceful living. It is not designed to create a civil religion, but to create an atmosphere of respect for each religion and faith. It is essential to prevent the spread of religious radicalism. It aims at fostering understanding and establishing peace in the world and, for the fulfillment of such an aim, the basic beliefs need no reassessment for any religious community. However, rejecting a true Messenger sent by Allah may not be the right step in the direction of salvation. Furthermore, the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said: "You only have faith when you desire for your brother what you desire for yourself."⁴ Every person desires good for himself in this life

¹*Exodus*, 30:11;31:17.

²*The Qur'ān*, 7:54.

³Al-Jirari, Abbas, *Dialogue from Islamic Point of View*, Publications of the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, ISESCO, Rabat1420H/2000. Also available on line at <http://www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Dialogue/dialogue.htm>

⁴*Al-Bukhari*, H. No. 13.

and the life to come so one must desire same good for his brother too wether that brother of his is Muslim or a non-Muslim. It is a principle which confirms that coexistence must be based on dialogue, which according to Islam allows the making of acquaintance with each other and the exchange of points of view in order to resolve differences with no recourse to violent confrontations whose aim is to decide on who is the winner and who is the loser. According to Mohamed Talbi:

In a word, today more than in any time before, our world, even with its conflicts and bloodshed, is in fact no more than an aggregate village where every man is really the neighbour of every other man. In your armchair you can hear and watch, in colour, on the screen of your television, what is going on everywhere in the world! Simultaneously, you can see and hear Clinton and Saddam Hussein. The language may be pleasant or unpleasant for you. But you cannot avoid what you see and hear! Henceforth and irrevocably, we are condemned to know, to exchange and to communicate.

In the field that is of our concern here, the dialogue with all men of all kinds of faiths and ideologies is from now and onwards strictly and irreversibly unavoidable. Man has never lived in isolation, and man's history may be considered as an irreversible process of an unceasingly extended communication. Man's fulfillment is in community and relationship.¹

Furthermore, he says:

¹Mohamed Talbi, 'Unavoidable Dialogue in a Pluralistic World: A Personal Account', *Encounters Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives*, Islamic Foundation, UK, vol. 1, No. 1, March 1995, p. 61.

Because I have been deeply committed to dialogue for many years, I feel it...my duty to urge caution lest the dialogue fail. The cornerstone to avoid failure is to accept, without reservation, the unavoidable diversity of believers in our unavoidably pluralistic world. If we accept this with sincerity, we are necessarily drawn to accept the other, our brother, as he is and as he likes to be. Therefore, we should not tolerate him momentarily, just as we tolerate a pain that we are eager to cure. Instead, we must respect fully his free choice as our equal brother in full dignity and in full liberty. In a word, we have to respect the right to be different as a basic human right, without interfering in what must be considered as the most sacred matter of conscience.

It is for these reasons that in Dialogue my perspective has always been directly related to my conceptions on religious pluralism, human freedom and responsibility, and at the same time, my desire for the need of a brotherly 'Community of communities'. For me, Dialogue is above all a mood, a spirit of openness, a disinteresting collaboration that does not challenge the presuppositions of the respective partners. We have to focus on cooperation in real and urgent issues confronting our human family, and the first step, toward peaceful co-existence and cooperation among communities of different faiths and ideologies, is to shy away from thinking in nationalistic or exclusive terms, to believing in global and universal one. We are, all of use, embarked on the same frail boat, and

from now onwards, we can have only an interdependent future.¹

Co-existence:

In spite of a few periods of a relatively higher degree of tolerance, respect, understanding and dialogue mankind had to wait until the eighteenth century to see religious dissent and free thinking claimed as a political right. The development culminated in the UN charter of Human Rights of 1948. The right to religious freedom is basically the right to decide for oneself, without any kind of pressure, fear and anxiety, to believe or not to believe. It is the right to espouse the faith of one's own choice, to worship and to bear witness to the faith of one's own choice freely.² Of which Almighty Allah says:

To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, he would have made you a single People, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.³

So the Qur'ān has already made it clear that everybody is free in choosing his way. There is no force of binding. The words,

¹Ibid., p. 67.

²*Encyclopaedia of the Holy Qur'ān*, Dr. N.K. Singh and A.R. Agwan, Ed's., First edition, Global Vision publishing House, Delhi, 2000, vol. 3, p.717.

³*The Qur'ān*, 5:48.

in the preceding verse, Law means *shari‘at* or rules of practical conduct and Open Way means *Minhāj* or the guidance of the prophet in all aspects of life.¹ By origin mankind were a single people or nation. That being so Allah could have kept us all alike, with one language, one kind of disposition, and one set of physical conditions (including climate) to live in. But in His wisdom, He gives us diversity in these things, not only at any given time, but in different periods and ages. This tests our capacity for Unity (*Wahdāniyah*) still more, and accentuates the need of Unity and Islam.² Almighty Allah says:

If Allah so willed, he could make you all one People: but He leaves straying whom He pleases, and he guides whom He pleases: but ye shall certainly be called to account for all your actions.³

Allah’s Will and Plan, in allowing limited free-will to man, is, not to force man’s will, but to give all guidance, and leave alone those who reject that guidance, in case they should repent and come back into Grace. But in all cases, in so far as we are given the choice, we shall be called to account for all our actions. “Leaving to stray” does not mean that we can do what we please. Our personal responsibility remains.⁴

This universe is necessarily pluralistic. An open Muslims *Ummah* whilst being globally indivisible, accepts and respects diversity, may be seen adumbrated in the constitution of Madīnah of 623 C.E. promulgated by the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) himself. This constitution brought into association, in

¹*The Holy Qur-ān: English Translation of the meanings and commentary*, The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, call and guidance, al-Madinah al-Munawarah, 1413 A.H., p. 300.

²Ibid.

³*The Qur’ān*, 16:93.

⁴*The Holy Qur-ān: English Translation of the meanings and commentary*, op. cit., p. 761.

a spirit of harmony, both Jews and Muslims and provided a foundation in theory and practice, for the right of the other to be different.

The Qur'ān has not only allowed, but required the concept of creation to underwrite an inclusive humanity, thus chastening Judaic particularity, as Christianity also did by dint of ‘redemption in Christ’? All the kindred’s of the earth might belong in one- a unison inside which all could possess their separate identity but without requiring that all other identities pay it the tribute of divine isolation.¹

The Islamic ethical framework for peaceful co-existence provides a secularly oriented common platform for socio-political and cultural interaction in multi-religious, pluralistic societies. It comprises tolerance, freedom of faith and conscience, the concept of universal brotherhood of mankind, dispensation of justice in an impartial manner, sanctity of pacts and agreements made with others as well as universally accepted principles of humanism.

One major hurdle in the way of peaceful co-existence has been the false notion of racial superiority. But the Qur'ān demolished the age-old structure of racial superiority by asserting the common origin of all human beings. It recognizes piety and righteousness as the sole basis of nobility and superiority. The Qur'ānic concept of the universal brotherhood of mankind is not an unattainable ideal. It is established by the historical fact that Islam during the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) had already realized that brotherhood which welded the high and the low, the rich and the poor, and the white and the black into one fraternity. It was the exemplary realization of this objective of Islam that prompted

¹Terence E. Fretheim, ‘Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith’, *The Muslim World Book Review*, The Islamic Foundation, UK, vol. 28/issue 3/ spring 2008, 2007, p. 217.

the noted historian Arnold Toynbee to write in his “Civilization on Trial”:

The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims in one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world, there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue. It is conceivable that the spirit of Islam might be the timely reinforcement, which would divide this issue in favour of tolerance and peace.¹

Another important measure taken by Islam in preparing the ground for communal harmony is that it enjoins its followers not only to tolerate other religions, but also refrain from showing any disrespect to their religious authorities: “Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah....”² It is worthy of mention in this context that the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) himself meted out a kind and gentle treatment to non-Muslims not only in the early years of his prophethood, but also in the later years at the height of his power. Here it will suffice to mention that the way he treated the delegation of the Christians of Najrān has no parallel in the history of other conquerors. He not only played host to them and lodged them in the prophetic *Masjid* at Madīnah, but also permitted them to offer prayers on Christian lines in the same *Masjid*.³

From what has been discussed above, it may appropriately be concluded that Islam is basically a unifying and pacific religion which teaches mankind how to agree to live together and co-operate with one another even while disagreeing on religious matters and belonging to different racial stocks and schools of thought. Thus the ethical teachings of Islam aim at making

¹Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, London, 1957, pp. 205-6.

²*The Qur’ān*, 6:108.

³Shibli Nomani, *Sirat al-Nabi*, n.d., vol. I, p. 292.

Muslims live in peace and harmony not only with themselves, their neighbors and society, but also with the environment and the universe. Lastly, the great importance which Islam attaches to moral values of life may also be fully grasped by the brilliant statement of the prophet Muhammad (SAAS): ‘I was raised as a prophet to bring to perfection the noble qualities of good behavior and good character.’¹ In this way, morality, instead of being separated from religion as in the contemporary concept of ethics, constitutes the very spirit of essence of Islam. Of the numerous challenges man faces today, perhaps the most crucial one is that the every stability of his society is threatened. The unprecedented material progress made by him in modern times seems to have only added to this misery, instead of serving him any useful purpose. He has become spiritually bankrupt, and fallen slave to his beastly lusts, although originally he was created as the noblest creature of Allah.

An analytical study of the Qur’ān reveals that to enable man to achieve success in this world as well as in the hereafter is the very essence of Islam. But this can be achieved only in a highly civilized society, the growth and stability of which depends, among other things, upon peaceful co-existence between members of different religious communities and schools of thought. It is because of such lofty notions of diversity and tolerance that the Islamic civilization was pluralistic and unusually tolerant of various social and religious denominations, something that was simply unthinkable elsewhere in the middle ages. Jewish historians testify to the fact that, had it not been for the protection and tutelage provided by Muslim rulers, Jews could not have survived in the middle Ages. It was all too natural for European Jewry to find refuge among Muslims in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire when Christian Europe was resorting to inquisition, pogroms and holocaust to exterminate them. Muslim rulers never interfered with the faiths of their subjects either. There

¹*Musnand Ahmad*, H. No. 9187. See also *as-Sagir ul-Jami‘a*, H. No. 4114.

was never anything like the inquisition or the fires of Smithfield. Thus a number of small Christian sects, regarded as heretical by the larger sects, who would inevitably have been exterminated if left to the mercies of the larger sects whose power prevailed in Christendom, were protected and preserved by the power of Islam. Even to this very day, there are groups like the Mountain Jews, Yazidis and Sabaeans (Sabians) that are surviving with their culture and religion intact.

It is quite obvious that the concept of coexistence arose with the emergence of societies, and grew out of the affinities between its members, but soon afterwards coexistence evolved to the point of arising as a result of necessity. Consequently, it is clear that whenever the number of members of any human society grows larger, the element of resemblance becomes weaker, in spite of its importance, and the element of necessity becomes stronger and leads to a situation whereby coexistence becomes imperative. While this notion of coexistence in its general linguistic meaning and according to the requirements of the Arabic grammatical stem *tafā'ul*, refers to the fact that one (group) has to live with the other, in its modern conventional meaning, this notion refers to the idea that such a coexistence has to be founded on peacefulness and quietude. This is confirmed by the fact that the word coexistence most often collocates with the attribute peaceful. Canon Brian Cox writes:

Pluralism can have two meanings. The first is existential pluralism which is the simple fact that diverse peoples exist in a given area, society, or organization. These entities are multiethnic, interreligious, or otherwise diverse—which are manifested in such cosmopolitan cities such as Los Angeles, Toronto, London, or Jerusalem. In other words, existential pluralism does not imply any principle. It is merely descriptive.

However, pluralism is also a principle or core value about how we ought to regard the existence of diverse entities in a given area, society, or organization. Pluralism, as a principle, begins with the belief that differences in language, ethnicity, gender, and many aspects of culture are, in and of themselves, something valuable. From the perspective of faith-based reconciliation, such differences are created by God or by humans creating as God has enabled them; they thus reflect the manifold glory of God's creation. The Torah, for instance, makes clear that God created humans into male and female and into nations.

The Qur'ān, as well, affirms diversity as part of God's purpose in creation. As it is written in Surah 49:13, "O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other, not that ye may despise each other. Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things." In the New Testament, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the time of Pentecost enabled people of diverse languages to understand one another. However, they retained their distinctive tongues, they manifested their diversity, but it was no longer a barrier that created enmity. Hence, in God's created order, humans fruitfully manifest variegated languages, architecture, music, dance, literature, technology, and political and economic organization.

Nevertheless, the beauty of differences is expressed not just in their isolation but also in communication, interaction, and relationship. The principle of pluralism deepens in recognition that greater wholeness, an even more enhanced beauty, is achieved when different people and communities come together and share their knowledge and goodwill.¹

Further he illustrates it as:

Pluralism, as a principle, means that we show respect for distinctions while we focus on the basis for common ground. In other words, pluralism is grounded in a respect for the dignity of every human being. The common good flows from the understanding that all human beings are created in the image or attributes of God and are, therefore, worthy of respect. Respect is a foundation of justice and, hence, part of what Aristotle defined as “our due,” what human beings owe to each other. Consider the Ten Commandments given to Moses and Israel. These were the essence or core of a moral law and can be summarized in one word: respect. At the heart of what human beings owe to each other is respect for one another’s personhood.²

Islam advocates making acquaintance with others. In other words it calls people to meet each other, to live together and to give and take whatever is useful according to the needs of each

¹Canon Brian Cox, *Faith-Based Reconciliation A Moral Vision That Transforms People and Societies*, Xlibris Corporation, America, 2007, p. 28.

²Ibid., p. 29.

other. Thus it advocates coexistence, with all the giving and taking that it involves and also the lasting mutual influence, avoiding all racial chauvinism, regional discrimination and cultural arrogance. Thus, Islam does not recognize any reason why one may be considered superior to the other, except in faith. Almighty Allah says:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you....¹

This is addressed to all mankind and not only to the Muslim brotherhood, though it is understood that in a perfected world the two would be synonymous. As it is, mankind is descended from one pair of parents. Their tribes, races, and nations are convenient labels by which we may know certain differing characteristics. Before Allah they are all one, and he gets most honor who is most righteous.² Best in conduct here refers to asking for preservation and immunity from all the damage and adversities that may befall one. The first verse of the Holy Qur'ān that mentions those who are characterized by this quality says: "This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah [who ward off (evil)]."³ *Taqwā* in the preceding verse, and the verbs and nouns connected with the root, signify: (1) the fear of Allah, which, according to the writer of Proverbs (i.7) in the Old Testament, is the beginning of Wisdom; (2) restraint, or guarding one's tongue, hand, and heart from evil; (3) hence righteousness, piety, good conduct,⁴

¹*The Qur'ān*, 49:13.

²*The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation of the meanings and commentary*, op. cit., p. 1593.

³*The Qur'ān*, 2:2.

⁴*The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation of the meanings and commentary*, op. cit., p. 7.

and thus shows that in the Book that was revealed unto the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) there is advice and guidance leading to the righteous path, which takes one to the righteous goal. The two following verses show that the faithful believers are those who believe in the unseen and accept and trust everything that was revealed upon the prophet Muhammad (SAAS), including what the brain and the feelings can hardly fathom. Those are the ones who perform their prayers regularly and without any interruption. Those are also the ones who spend what Allah has bestowed unto them in charity and who give alms and who are generous. Those are also the ones who believe in all the Holy Books and the Messengers upon whom they were revealed. Finally, they are those who believe firmly in the Hereafter, where there is reckoning and recompense. Almighty Allah says:

Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; and who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter.¹

Therefore, righteousness comes from a secure faith, from sincere devotion to Allah, and from unselfish service to Man. Knowing people presumes being able to do so, including the capability to accept difference in opinion and difference in creed. Islam assumes that difference is an inherent part of the essence of life and of the natural disposition of man. Almighty Allah created the universe and all the things and creatures that live on it on the basis of obvious difference both in terms of variety and quantity. This is clear in all aspects and appearances. Almighty Allah says: “And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for

¹*The Qur'ān*, 2:3-4.

those who know.”¹ Almighty Allah stresses this truth which cannot be subject to change and says: “If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind One People: but they will not cease to differ, except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His Mercy....”² In other words, Allah’s rule on earth is based upon the differences between human beings, be they race, language or religious differences or any other difference in any one of the components of civilization and culture. Islam thus considers the matter to be under Allah’s will and the underlying motivation which is inherent in it. Almighty Allah emphasizes this will and what it engenders concerning the absence of coercion upon people to adopt Islam and says: “If it had been thy Lord’s Will, they would all have believed,—all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind against their will, to believe!”³ This noble verse expresses the fact that if God had willed it, He would have made all people have the same levels of understanding and comprehension that would lead them to Islam.

If it had been Allah’s Plan or Will not to grant the limited Free-will that He has granted to man, His omnipotence could have made all mankind alike: all would then have had Faith, but that Faith would have reflected no merit on them. In the actual world as it is, man has been endowed with various faculties and capacities, so that he should strive and explore, and bring himself into harmony with Allah’s Will. Hence Faith becomes a moral achievement, and to resist Faith becomes a sin. As a complementary proposition, men of Faith must not be impatient or angry if they have to contend against Unfaith, and most important of all, they must guard against the temptation of forcing Faith,

¹Ibid., 30:22.

²Ibid., 11:118-9.

³Ibid., 10:99.

i.e., imposing it on others by physical compulsion. Forced faith is no faith. They should strive.¹

On the basis of this, Allah's prophet, Muhammad (SAAS), cannot eradicate this difference whatever he did. For all this, and especially from the perspective of difference, Islam does not oblige or coerce anybody to adopt it. Almighty Allah says: "There is no compulsion in religion...."² In the same verse, Almighty Allah responds to whoever might wonder about the reason for this lack of coercion: "...Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects Tagut³ and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks...."⁴ This is a motivating response, which also means that Almighty Allah promises the tolerant Muslims, who have faith that they are safe and successful; like the man who holds unto a sturdy rope cannot fear that he will collapse or fall. Henceforth, the coexistence, pluralistic society and peaceful atmosphere demands tolerance from all individuals.

Tolerance:

It is a fact that lack of tolerance and courtesy on the part of one faith community towards the followers of other faiths often triggers off communal disturbances. This also stirs up enmity between nations. But the Qur'ān has struck at the very root of this problem by asking its followers not only to tolerate other faiths, but also to respect their prophets. Unlike other faiths or religions, Islam recognizes and respects prophets of all faiths, both known and unknown. No other scripture can show such texts as quoted below from the Qur'ān:

¹*The Holy Qur-ān: English Translation of the meanings and commentary*, op. cit., pp. 576-7.

²*The Qur'ān*, 2:256.

³'Tagut' here means; anything worshipped beside Allah.

⁴*The Qur'ān*, 2:256.

Say (O Muhammad): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered.¹

Islam does not believe in coercion and intolerance, as is clear from the Qur'anic verse: “*lā ikrāha fi ad-dīn....*”² Belief or faith is a thing that people must choose for themselves. That is why Allah has not forced anyone to be a true believer and has given him the free will to choose between various options. The Qur'an says: “Say, ‘The Truth is from your Lord’ let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it)....”³ Religious aggressors are threatened with a ‘humiliation’ in this world and a ‘mighty chastisement’ in the Hereafter in the verse 114 of chapter 2nd of the Qur'an. Churches, monasteries, synagogues and masājid, according to the 40th verse of the 22nd chapter of the Qur'an are all places of worship. The prophet Muhammad (SAAS) was repeatedly told not to feel bad when he was rejected by some people: “And if they reject thee, so did their predecessors, to whom came their messengers with Clear Signs, Scriptures and the illuminating Book.”⁴ Muhammad's (SAAS) duty was only to convey the message: “If then they turn away, We have not sent thee as a guard over them. Thy duty is but to convey (The Message)....”⁵ All these verses make it clear that there is no room for coercion or compulsion in matters of faith. Islam is basically a tolerant religion. The difference between peoples, nations, races and religions may lead to conflict and therefore man's responsibility remains in

¹Ibid., 2:136.

²Meaning: there is no compulsion in religion, *The Qur'an*, 2:256.

³*The Qur'an*, 18:29.

⁴Ibid., 35:25.

⁵Ibid., 42:48.

establishing peace and tranquility in the society. It is important that a balance is established in the society based on mutual respect, love and compassion rejecting all types of arrogance, whether it is material or intellectual and establishing such balance between different nations and communities is possible only by sharing knowledge about each other. The Qur'ān states: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other...."¹ Knowing and respecting each other and dialogue and communication is the best way to avoid mistrust and overcome differences. Establishing harmonious relations between peoples have been repeatedly emphasized in Islam. The Qur'ān states:

Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: For Allah loveth those who are just.²

In other verse the Qur'ān states: "Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious...."³ In another verse the Qur'ān states: "And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, Except in the best way, unless it be with those of them who do wrong...."⁴ From the very start, one would like to insist that tolerance is a very important value in Islam and that in Arabic etymology it originates from the word meaning indulgence. It is an overall feature of Islam which characterizes all its aspects of worship, jurisprudence and behavior. The prophet Muhammad (SAAS) has highlighted the importance of this feature and made it the epitome of Islam when he said: "I came with the upright and tolerant religion."⁵ And when

¹Ibid., 49:13.

²Ibid., 60:8.

³Ibid., 16:125.

⁴Ibid., 29:46.

⁵Musnand Ahmad, H. No. 2295 & As-Sahihat ul-Silsilah, H. No. 881.

somebody asked him (SAAS): “Which religion is liked most by God?”, he (SAAS) replied: “The upright and tolerant religion”.¹ As to “the upright religion”, it has been mentioned in several verses of the Holy Qur’ān, as in Almighty Allah’s command when he orders the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and the Muslims to express their view concerning what some people of the Book allege about Islam, including the chauvinism expressed in their views and defamation of others, and to state that they believe in all the holy Books and the messengers upon whom these books were revealed:

They say: “Become Jews or Christians if ye would be guided (to salvation).” Say thou: “Nay! (I would rather) the Religion of Abraham the True, and he joined not gods with Allah.” Say ye: “We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismā‘il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we submit to Allah.”²

As to the adjective “tolerant” it is related in Arabic derivation to magnanimity, indulgence and permissibility. From an etymological point of view it refers to meanings such as generosity, and openhandedness. Then, it acquired the meanings of ease and leniency in interaction with other people and contexts which call for tolerance and generosity. The prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said: “Indulgence reaps benefit and tighthandedness reaps misfortune.”³ He (SAAS) also said: “God Bless an indulgent man when he sells, when he buys and when he is in need.”⁴ A man asked him (SAAS) once:

¹*Musnand Ahmad*, H. No. 2141.

²*The Qur’ān*, 2: 135-6.

³Al-Aljouni, *Kashf al-Khafa*, Maktabat al-Qudsi, vol. I, p. 456.

⁴*Al-Bukhari*, H. No. 2076.

"O prophet of God, which is the best work?", the prophet Muhammad replied: "Believing in God, almsgiving and fighting holy wars for the sake of God and a blessed pilgrimage". The man said: "This is hardly possible to achieve, O prophet of God". The prophet then replied: "Addressing others tenderly, generosity, indulgence and treating others nicely".¹

From this behavioral side and all aspects which derive therefrom and which are related to Islam in its whole, the notion of tolerance appears as a distinctive feature which characterizes the society which Islam advocates and where people are called upon to coexist. It is a religion of magnanimity, in which there should be neither discomfort nor chauvinism, neither exaggeration nor extremism, neither violence nor terrorism, be it towards oneself or the others.² It still remains that the issue of tolerance examined from this wide perspective needs clarification, albeit from a brief discussion of the morphology of the word tolerance. The word *tasāmūh* (meaning tolerance) has the same form as that of *ta'āyush* (meaning coexistence) and coined on the basis of the form *tafā'ul*. It is closer in meaning to the verb of origin which is that of forgiving, or to the meaning of spontaneous compliance resulting from the tolerance of the religion itself and its call to all Muslims to be tolerant. All this in spite of the fact that one do not discard the form of *tafā'ul* which refers to the notion of participating in efficacy and reciprocity. This obviously points to the positive stand of Islam towards mutual forgiving, if the other party is capable of doing so also.

...True religious tolerance will only be
achieved when men learn to respect the

¹*Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal*, H. No. 17847.

²See Dr. Abbas Al Jirari, *Tasamuh al-Islam ma'a adh-Dhat wal Akhar (Tolerance of Islam toward the self and the other)*, Maktabat ul Ma'ārif, Rabat, Morocco, 1995.

religious beliefs of those they consider to be mistaken. The key to tolerance is not the removal or relativization of disagreement, but the willingness to accept genuine disagreement. For Muslims, any effective remedy to intolerance must be found in Islam itself, that is, the remedy is submission to the Will of God. We must learn to better appreciate and respect the tolerance prescribed by Islam if we are to be worthy of calling ourselves Muslims.¹

Today, this rumour and lie is being spread that Islam and its followers do not have any tolerance towards the people of other faiths. This is a misleading and baseless propaganda. This is part of the planned world conspiracies to malign and defame Islam and Muslims. In fact, Islam is the religion of blessings, kindness and tolerance for all humanity without any differentiation. It stresses on its followers to behave with equality, sympathy, love and tolerance towards non-Muslims. But everything has its limitations.

Pluralism as a principle also means that diversity has its limits, which must be defined by every society in terms of the range of tolerable deviation from the norm. No society can embrace unlimited diversity. Nor should it. Not all diversity is redemptive or even an expression of the noble character of human nature. While racism, for example, might lurk in the human heart, should it be embraced as an acceptable aspect of diversity? This, of course, raises a fundamental tension between the expression of individual freedom and the need to subordinate the rights of the individual to the common good of the society. At what point

¹Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, Alhoda publishers and Distributors, London, 1999, pp. 149-50.

does the deviation from the norm become antisocial or destructive to communal harmony? How are the limits to diversity established, enforced, and adjusted? How does this relate to being a free and open society as opposed to an authoritarian and closed society?¹

Though there are theories and propounders of non-violence but the limitations of coexistence, pluralism and peace may result in violence.

Non-violence:

The very word, Islam is the negation of the concept of violence. Islam means surrender to the will of God. The word for peace in Arabic is *Salām*. When Muslims greet each other, they invoke peace—*as-Salāmu Alykum* (peace be on you). It is the religious duty of Muslims to strive for establishment of peace in society. A Muslim is one who surrenders to the will of Allah and is an establisher of peace.² According to the Qur’ān, a true Muslim lives and dies in submission to Allah. His implicit faith in Allah based on the dynamic formula ‘*lā ilāha illallāh*’ (there is no object of worship except Allah) give him those values of life which earn him peace and universal brotherhood. He has no greed and ambition in life except to please Allah and to carry the message of peace to others so that all may live in happiness and harmony. He has no double standard of behavior towards Muslims or non-Muslims. For him the whole of humanity is a brotherhood. With such broad concepts of religion, a Muslim cannot afford to be violent. Above all Islam is a simple and scientific religion, which has to be understood before it is accepted. Therefore, the Qur’ān states categorically: “There is no compulsion in religion....”³ The Qur’ān specifically prohibits Muslims from abusing those

¹Canon Brian Cox, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

²*Encyclopaedia of the Holy Qur’ān*, op. cit., p. 971.

³*The Qur’ān*, 2:256.

who believe in gods other than Allah. It says: “Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance....”¹ Not only that, the Qur’ān prohibits believers from abusing other gods, it also makes it clear to them that to every people have we made their deeds fair seeming; that to their lord is their return, so He will inform them of what they did. “...Thus have We made alluring to each people its own doings. In the end will they return to their Lord and He shall then tell them the truth of all that they did.”²

The myth that the Qur’ān and sword go together, arose much later and its cause should be seen in history not in the Qur’ān. Although, the Qur’ān makes a distinction between faith (which includes ways of worshiping and associated rituals), and one’s overall situation, social as well as political. It is certainly not faith which calls for violence it is one’s own socio-political situation which might demand it. Violence used under certain social circumstances cannot be blamed on one’s own *dīn* (faith). The Qur’ān adopts radically different position as far as faith is concerned. It is most tolerant and liberal religion. Four key concepts advocated by the Qur’ān are ‘*adl*, *ihsān*, *rahmah*, and *hikmah* that is justice, benevolence, compassion, and wisdom. None of these concepts would promote violence. The very spirit of these four key concepts would be injured by violence. Yet, the vested interests would see it that none of these concepts is established in the society. Islam, in fact, did not seek to fight peaceful idolaters, much less seeking their forceful conversion. In fact, it sought to fight the idols of greed, desire, and interests to establish a society based on unity and equality of all human beings. Thus, the ethics of non-violence that is contained in Islam is of an activistic and positive good to human beings and extending help to them in the hour of their adversity. As for as the ‘Islamic Radicalism’ and ‘Muslim Terrorism’ is concerned Ali A. Mazrui has to say:

¹Ibid., 6: 108.

²Ibid.

I have never heard the problem better formulated. Indeed, there are global cause of Islamic radicalism and global reasons why “Muslim terrorism” has gone international. One factor is the “Latin Americanization” of the Middle East by American policy-makers and strategists. Just as Latin America had for nearly two centuries been regarded by the United States as fair grounds for imperial manipulation and periodic military interventions, much of the Muslim world, especially the Middle East, has more recently been treated with similar imperial arrogance. American imperialism in Latin America had been an empire of control rather than one of occupation. The same is true of American imperialism in the Middle East.

The second major trigger of globalized Islamic radicalization consists of the state of Israel; its brutal occupation of the Palestinian people; the annexation of Jerusalem; and the United States’ enormous material, diplomatic, and uncritical support of the Jewish state. Israeli behavior cannot even be censured by the United Nations Security Council without encountering an American Veto. Due to the United States, Israel has been enjoying almost total immunity since at least the 1967 war in the Middle East. The United States provides Israel with an umbrella of impunity. The resulting international frustration has aroused widespread rage throughout the Muslim world.

The third international trigger of Islamic radicalism and major cause of Muslim terrorism is the multiple humiliations of Muslims in so many different countries. Three Muslim

countries are under direct foreign occupation (whether acknowledged or not)—Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. Two Muslim populations are under some kind of international trusteeship—Bosnia and Kosovo. Several Muslim minorities elsewhere are struggling for self-determination against enormous military odds—including Kashmir, Chechnya, southern Philippines, southern Thailand, and elsewhere. No other civilization in the contemporary world is under a comparable sense of siege. This is quite apart from lower intensity rivalries between Muslims and non-Muslims in Nigeria, the Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire), and Ethiopia. (I regard the conflicts in Sudan as more Arab versus less Arabized, rather than Muslim against non-Muslims). Politically and militarily, the Muslim Ummah is more sinned against than sinning.¹

Further, adding to the causes of ‘Muslim radicalization’, Ali A. Mazrui writes:

... there are also domestic causes of Muslim radicalization, as well as global causes. Such domestic causes include authoritarian Arab monarchs and other undemocratic Muslim regimes. But even those domestic radicalizing forces might not have risen to levels of terrorism if they were not reinforced by a resentment of American support for most Muslim dictators for decades—especially oil-rich dictators, but along

¹Ali A. Mazrui, ‘Liberal Islam versus Moderate Islam: Elusive Moderates and the Siege Mentality’, Katherine Bullock, Ed., *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Association of Muslim Social Scientists and International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, USA, vol. 22, Summer 2005, No. 3, pp. 83-4.

with oil-poor Pakistan and Egypt. Pro-democracy forces in countries like Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia were enough to politicize Islam, and even to radicalize it. But the rise of temperature to terrorism is almost always ignited by anti-Americanism or anti-westernism, even at the domestic level.¹

Further, showing the way how to get out from terrorism and radicalism, Ali A. Mazrui quotes Graham E. Fuller:

As long as conditions in the Muslim world remain radicalized—by terrorism, the sweeping American military response, dictatorship across the region, and a sense of Islam under siege—only radical groups will flourish. Moderation and liberalization can only flourish in a quieter and freer environment, where radical voices find limited response.²

Showing a second face of it, B. Lewis says:

... there is nothing in Islamic history to compare with the massacres and expulsions, the inquisitions and persecutions that Christians habitually inflicted on non-Christians and still more on each other. In the lands of Islam, persecution was the exception; in Christendom, sadly, it was often the norm.³

Islam between Truth and Allegations:

¹Ibid., pp. 84-5.

²Ibid., p. 85.

³B. Lewis, *The multiple identities of the Middle East*, Schoken Books, New York, 1998, p. 129.

One of most famous allegation on Muslims and Islam is that they converted the people with force under its commandment. The allegation is baseless. Even western scholars have repudiated the myth of Muslims coercing others to convert. The great historian De Lacy O'Leary wrote:

History makes it clear, however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims, sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of sword upon conquered race is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated.¹

Ruled Spain for roughly 800 years, during this time, and up until they were finally forced out, the non-Muslims there were alive and flourishing. Additionally, Christian and Jewish minorities have survived in the Muslim lands of the Middle East for centuries. Countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan all have significant Christian or Jewish populations. This is not surprising to a Muslim, for his faith prohibits him from forcing others to see his point of view. The Glorious Qur'an says:

There is no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects Tagut² and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.³

By participating in dialogue, Muslims can neutralize misinformation about Islam. An impression has gained ground among non-Muslims that Muslims impose their religion upon others. Muslims can impress upon those who care to listen that though they have absolute belief in the superiority of their

¹De Lacy O'Leary, *Islam at the crossroads*, London, 1923, p. 8.

²'Tagut' here means; anything worshipped beside Allah.

³The Qur'an, 2: 256.

religion, and this sense of superiority is derived from the Qur'ānic assertion, "The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will)...."¹ They claim no divine right to impose Islam upon others. Even this unambiguous and seminal statement on tolerance and freedom to practice religion of one's choice is pooh-poohed with a dismissive remark that this statement was made when Muslims were persecuted and were in dire need of the right to practice religion freely and when they assumed power, they conveniently forgot this statement. This cynical reaction is very uncharitable and unhistorical. According to Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī:

Considering history objectively, we find that Islam spread in what we call "The Arab world" and "the Islamic world" through some Muslims, whether merchants or scholars. They migrated to these lands in Asia and Africa, mingled with the indigenous people and dealt with them. Consequently, their good manners, sincerity, and religion led these natives to love them and to convert to Islam in multitudes.

On the other hand, even in countries conquered by Muslim armies to remove material hardships before Islam and convey its message to their people, they were entitled to choose their religion. Thus, these people adopted Islam willingly, so much that the Umayyad rulers used to exact Jizyah (the tribute) from newly converted Muslim in Egypt because of the large numbers of those who had embraced Islam. But 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (may Allah be pleased with him) abolished this tribute declaring his well known saying, "Surely, Allah has sent

¹Ibid., 3: 19.

Muhammad as a guide not as a Jizya collector”.¹

The second chapter of the Qur’ān is known as a chapter associated with Madīnah where Muslims were in power. The Qur’ān does not espouse the cause of tolerance and freedom of worship in a single verse. There are other verses too.

If it had been thy Lord’s Will, they would all have believed,- all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind against their will, to believe!²

We showed him the Way: Whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will).³

Say, “The Truth is from your Lord”: Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it)....⁴

It is not easy to discuss about a religion that is not only the least understood of all major religions but is now considered to be on a collision course with the rest of the world. The offensive cartoon controversy has only heightened the mistrust and seemed to embolden those who have been selling the poisonous pill of ‘clash of civilization’. There is no denying that 9/11 has provided bigots, racist, and self-proclaiming ‘experts’ and ‘think tanks’ to define Islam in ways that only unmask their level of hatred and bigotry. The ‘Islam’ they define is simply unknown to Muslims. Yet the hard fact is that there are Muslims who come in different shades and colors,

¹Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh of Muslim Minorities–Contentious Issues & Recommended Solutions*, Al-Falah Foundation, Cairo, Egypt, 2003, p. 5.

²*The Qur’ān*, 10: 99.

³Ibid., 76: 3.

⁴Ibid., 18: 29.

orientations or mindsets. Not all are saints nor are all *Mujāhids* in being able to control their lower instincts of anger, passion and ego. The prophet Muhammad (SAAS) defined a true Muslim as: “One who harms no one with his/her words and actions, and who is the most trustworthy representative of universal peace.”¹ Writing on the topic “The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective”, M. Fethullah Gulen says:

...Muslims travel everywhere with this sublime feeling that they nourish deep in their spirits. Contrary to giving torment and suffering, they are remembered everywhere as symbols of safety and security. In their eyes, there is no difference between a physical violation and a verbal violation, such as backbiting, false accusation, insult, and ridicule.²

As the specter of violence has become a fact of life today, the temptation is too great to condemn an entire religious tradition for the senseless or desperate actions of a few. But that would be wrong. If we cannot condemn all faiths for the crimes of their adherents, we simply cannot have a different set of standards for Muslims. For example, if we cannot condemn Christianity for colonization and massacre of unarmed civilians across the globe during the last two millennia, including the massacre in Jonestown (Guyana) and Waco (USA), killings in Ireland, Uganda, Haiti and Liberia, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Daghestan, Nagorno Karabach and Mindanao Islands (in the Philippines), and genocides in Congo, Rwanda, and in today’s Afghanistan and Iraq; if we cannot condemn Judaism for the crimes of Baruch Goldstein or Rabbi

¹M. Fethullah Gulen, “The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective”, *Fountain* volume 3, Issue 31, 2000, 25 June 2009, <http://pghdialogue.org/index.php?Itemid=41&id=1&option=com_content&task=view>.

²Ibid.

Meir Kahane's group, or the war crimes of Israeli leaders—Sharon, Olmert, Netanyahu and others—in Occupied Palestine and Lebanon; if we cannot condemn Hinduism for the murder of MK Gandhi, and massacre of thousands of Muslims in Kashmir, Mumbai, Assam and Gujarat, and the killings of Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka; if we cannot condemn Buddhism for the killing fields in Cambodia, or the massacre of Rohingya Muslims in Arakan (Myanmar), or the killings of Tamils in Sri Lanka and Muslim minorities in Thailand—we simply have no right to condemn Islam for 9/11. Though it is still disputed whether the incident of 9/11 was planned by some Muslims or by some Jews or by the western imperialists. Interestingly according to Mahmood Mamdani:

One of the most amazing news items I read in the weeks following 9/11 was in The New York Times: Sales of the Qur'an had soared in the United States as more and more Americans sought to read it for clues as to what had motivated the hijackers. In the months and years that followed, I wondered if the people of Afghanistan or Iraq, even Fallujah, were reading the Bible for an explanation for the bombs raining upon them from on high. I doubt that any of them really did. I wondered what explained this difference.¹

If a Muslim youth today appears to be frustrated and angry it is not because of the theology of Islam but due to his apparent inability as a human being to comprehend and/or tolerate monumental hypocrisy and double standards that he sees, plus the mistreatment of his fellow brethren as third-class citizens of this planet. From one continent to another, he sees how his fellow human beings are massacred, maimed and mutilated;

¹Mahmood Mamdani, 'Culture Talk: Six Debates that Shape the Discourse on "Good" Muslims', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, op. cit., pp. 95-6.

how colossal abuses of human rights are routinely carried out against them. And yet there are none, not even their own leaders in the post-colonial nation-states, who speak and take action for them. It is a sad and humiliating experience for them. Talking about this Abid Ullah Jan has to say:

...the so-called extremism in the Muslim world is not the result of Muslims' faith. Rather, it is a function of the perpetually colonized and oppressed people due to the lack of true independence and a central authority to control and productively channel their energies.¹

Taking readers' attention towards other side of the problem, Abid Ullah Jan writes:

Muslims never built gas chambers, used nuclear weapons, or commanded genocidal sanctions against nations that were already on their knees. Islam does not sanction concentration camps and the systematic massacre of non-Muslims.²

Further, he adds:

So long as Muslims find themselves living under extended colonial and externally imposed or protected regimes in environments that lack opportunity and provide no sense of justice and security, Islam will find itself sought out as a cure in the political realm.

Due to the economic exploitation by global institutes, the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Muslim nations continues to remain

¹Abid Ullah Jan, 'Moderate Islam: A product of American Extremism', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, op. cit., p. 30.

²Ibid., pp. 31-2.

stagnant. In addition, while they still struggle to pay off their debts and have to cater to the need of their rising populations, concerned individuals will continue to question the double standards they face. For example, they see Kuwait receive billions of dollars worth of reparations for its 6-month occupation by Iraq, whereas others could not get a dime for reeling under decades of colonial and other occupations.¹

Ongoing revival of the memory of the Crusades is another factor that makes West afraid of Islam and Muslims:

Another factor that makes Americans afraid of Islam and Muslims is the ongoing revival of the memory of the Crusades and all of its legacy and literature that was transformed into stories, novels, and plays. Thousands of such tools, based on the Arabian Nights as well as literature related to the Crusades and European colonialism in the Muslim world, are still found in western markets. These show the worst aspects of how the Muslims distorted Islam and are now being used to remind Westerners to feel uncomfortable with the Muslim presence in their societies.²

While ignorance is bliss, little knowledge is dangerous. Nearly seventy years ago, Marmaduke Pickthall, the English poet and translator of the Qur’ān said:

If Europe had known as much of Islam, as Muslims knew of Christendom in those days [of

¹Ibid., p. 35.

²Taha Jabir al-Alwani, ‘Reflections on the “Moderate Muslims” Debate’, *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, op. cit., p. 117.

the Crusades] those mad, adventurous, occasionally chivalrous and heroic, but utterly fanatical outbreak known as the Crusades could not have taken place, for they were based on a complete misapprehension.¹

The Muslims and non-Muslims alike must make sincere efforts to be acquainted with the true teachings of Islam and authentic history of Muslim culture and civilization for that can ensure peace and tranquility in this conflict ridden world. This is also important as that can alone change the western mindset which is vital to bring an end of hegemony and unilateralism.

... the United States and Europe could use the presence of Islam in their midst to build better relationships with the Islamic world, instead of spreading fear among their citizens....Moreover, their [Muslims] values are very close to those of the Founding Fathers, particularly as regards family values and protecting the environment. Thus, Muslims can help Americans rebuild their traditional core values.²

In monthly magazine; Islam, Muslims & the World, Dr. Javed Jamil writes:

While the detractors of Islam attack Muslims and Islam in order to vanquish them so that their own objectives can be achieved without much resistance, Muslims fail to see and present their positives, which despite several weaknesses, are

¹Marmaduke Pickthall, Madras Lectures on Islam, India, 1927. 22 Feb. 2010. <<http://home.pacific.net.sg/~makhdoom/islamtol.html>>

²Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, op. cit., p. 117.

much more glaring than what the Western and other civilizations can offer or boast of.¹

Dr. Javed Jamil further writes:

Obama's triumph is not being celebrated just because of him. More than that, the tears of joy symbolize the end of a ruler, and his legacy, whom the humanity at large now considers to be no less a tyrant than Hitler. If Hitler massacred millions of helpless Jews, Bush murdered millions of innocent Muslims. The good thing is that his bombardment of Afghanistan and Iraq did not just hurt Muslims, they pained the whole mankind.²

On the other hand we have many examples from the history of Muslims which prove that non-Muslims during the hey day of Muslims were well treated by Muslims and by their rulers. Shiekh Dr. Yusuf al-Qarađāwī has cited examples from the *Sīrah*, biography of the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and his companions (RA) of good treatment of non-Muslim neighbors and of people of other faiths.³ Some of them are:

1. The Prophet sent gifts to be distributed among poor Makkans in spite of their hostility toward Islam;
2. The Prophet (SAWS) also sent gifts to the kings and accepted gifts from them;
3. The prophet assigned an annual charity for a Jewish family in Madina;

¹*Islam, Muslims & the World*, Javed Jamil, Ed., Saharanpur, Dec. 2008, p. 5.

²Ibid.

³Yusuf al Qardawi, *Halal and Haram*, Islamic Book Trust, Kuala Lumpur, see chapter 5 on: The Relationship of Muslims with non-Muslims, pp. 336-43.

4. When Um al Harith ibn Rabi'ah, a Christian woman died, some of the companions attended her funeral;
5. When a sheep was slaughtered in one of the companions' home, the companion sent a portion of it to his Jewish neighbor;
6. Following the Prophet's way, caliph 'Umar sent his non-Muslim brother a piece of garment as a gift.
7. The Prophet borrowed money from non-Muslims when needed.
8. He honored non-Muslims while alive or dead. It was narrated that a funeral passed by the Prophet (SAWS), so he stood up in respect for it. His companions told him that it was the funeral of a Jew. The Prophet (SAWS) replied, "Isn't it a human soul".¹

The peaceful nature of Muslims can be seen from the covenant of 'Umar (RA), which he gave to the people of Jerusalem:

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

This is what 'Abdullāh 'Umar, Prince of the Believers, has guaranteed to the people of Iliā' (Jerusalem);

He guaranteed their lives, property, churches and crosses....Their churches will not be dwelt in by (foreigners), nor will they be destroyed or ruined in any part. Nor will their crosses or property (be destroyed);

They will not be persecuted for their religion, nor will they be molested;

¹See Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, USA, 2007, p. 61.

Jews shall not be allowed to live with them in Iliā’;

The inhabitants of Iliā’ shall pay the jizya as much as that of the inhabitants of Madā’in;

They shall require the Rūm (Byzantines) and the thieves to leave the city. If they leave, they shall be secured in their lives and property until they reach (their country). Those (Byzantines) who prefer to stay, shall be given security and should accept the same obligations as those of the inhabitants of Iliā’, concerning the jizya;

Those who prefer to go with the Rūm from among the inhabitants of Iliā’ shall be secured in their lives and property (provided) they leave their churches and crosses....

Those who were in it (the city) from among the people of the land (farmers?), before the death of so and so, shall be allowed, if they wish, to stay in the city and shall have the same obligations as those of the inhabitants of Iliā’ concerning the jizya. Those who prefer to leave with the Rūm, (may do so); those who prefer to go to their people (their land), (may do so) until the time of their harvest;

This document is guaranteed by the assurance of Allāh, of His Apostle, of the Caliphs, and of the believers, if (the inhabitants) paid their duties of the jizya;

Witnesses are: Khālid Ibn al-Walīd, ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Āṣ, ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn ‘Auf, and Mu‘āwiya Ibn Abī Sufyān.¹

After observing peaceful nature of Islam and Muslims, one can not deny that the Muslims are deprived of the peace in its

¹Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, Leiden, 1879-1901, vol.V, pp. 2405-6. The English translation is by Majid Khadduri given in *The Law of War and Peace in Islam*, London, 1941, p. 94.

entirety but are still in a much better state of peace than others. As Dr. Javed Jamil writes:

Muslims of the current world have adopted Islam partially. This partial application has deprived them of the peace in its entirety. Still they are in a much better state of peace than the people living in the so-called developed world are. This is evident from the fact that they have

- One of the lowest rates of murders
- Almost negligible incidence of suicides
- Very low rates of rapes
- Negligible consumption of alcohol and alcohol-related deaths and other problems
- Very low rate of gambling related problems
- Extremely low level of family break-ups
- Extremely low number of prostitutes and pornographic actors among them
- Negligible level of sexual abuse of children
- Very low incidence of sex-related, alcohol related and gambling related diseases
- Relatively low incidence of drug addiction
- Relatively low incidence of psychiatric illness
- Relatively very low level of the consumption of sedatives and tranquillisers
- Very low incidence of single parents, negligible number of children born out of wedlock

- Relatively much lower level of promiscuity and other sexual perversions
- Very low level of abortions including teenage pregnancies, etc
- Relatively low incidence of several diseases including Cancers of Penis and Cervix (due to circumcision), sex transmitted diseases, Urinary Tract Infections, other cancers due to alcohol, etc.¹

Jihād and Qitāl:

Some Qur'ānic verses are adduced in corroboration of their arguments. Those who are not well versed in the Qur'ānic text and context, history and cause of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) easily get convinced of the violent and war "mongering" nature of Islam. The concept of *Jihād* has created serious misunderstanding in the mind of both Muslims and non-Muslims. *Jihād* is often understood as a war of aggression, subjugator of non-Muslims and imposing *jizya* over them. It is no wonder, then, that Islam and violence have become an integral whole. But contrary to this, the Qur'ān upholds the sanctity and absolute value of human life:

On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person—unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land—It would be as if he slew the whole people: And if any one saved a life. It would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. Then although there came to them Our Messengers with Clear Signs, yet, even after that, many of them continued to commit excesses in the land.²

¹*Islam, Muslims & the World*, op. cit., p.5.

²*The Qur'ān*, 5: 32.

In another place the Qur'ān says:

Say: "Come, I will rehearse what Allah hath (really) prohibited you from": join not anything with Him: be good to your parents; kill not your children on a plea of want;—We provide sustenance for you and for them;—come not nigh to indecent deeds, whether open or secret; take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law: Thus doth He command you, that ye may learn wisdom.¹

The same message continues in different parts of the Qur'ān and in the Ḥadīth:

Anas bin Malik narrated that the prophet said, "The biggest of Al-Kabā'ir (the great sins) are: to join others as partners in worship of Allah, to murder a human being, to be undutiful to one's parents and to make a false statement," or said, "to give a false witness."²

At another place it is mentioned that:

'Ubada bin As-Samat narrated that I was among those Naqibs (selected leaders) who gave the Pledge of allegiance to Allah's Apostle. We gave the oath of allegiance, that we would not join partners in worship besides Allah, would not steal, would not commit illegal sexual intercourse, would not kill a life which Allah has forbidden, would not commit robbery, would not disobey (Allah and His Apostle), and if we fulfilled this pledge we would have

¹Ibid., 6: 151.

²*Al-Bukhari*, H.No. 6871.

Paradise, but if we committed any one of these (sins), then our case will be decided by Allah.¹

Similarly, at another place it is said that:

Ibn Abbās narrated that the prophet said, “The most hated persons to Allah are three: A person who deviates from the right conduct, i.e., an evil doer, in the Harām (sanctuaries of Makkah and Madinah); a person who seeks that the traditions of the Pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance, should remain in Islam and a person who seeks to shed somebody’s blood without any right.”²

Further, it is mentioned that:

‘Abdullah bin ‘Amr narrated that the Prophet said, “Whoever killed a person having a treaty with the Muslims, shall not smell of Paradise though its smell is perceived from a distance of forty years.”³

After these teachings and instructions one can not stick on saying that Muslims can not live with non-Muslims. Likewise, “Terrorism”, is to bomb, kill, demolish and destroy ones life and property, which in the Qur’ānic terminology is mentioned as ‘*Fasād fi al-Arqā*’. Its punishment is very heavy in Islam. In the verse 33 of the chapter *Mā’idah* in the Qur’ān, Almighty Allah says:

The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of

¹Ibid., H.No. 6873.

²Ibid., H.No. 6882.

³Ibid., H.No. 3166.

hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land: That is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter.¹

It is alleged by some adverse critics of Islam either out of jealousy or ignorance that lasting peace and cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims is not possible as the former are under religious obligation to carry on the *jihād*, the ‘holy war’, against disbelievers for the purpose of compelling them to accept the Muslim faith. They seek to support this point by misquoting the following and other like verses containing stern commandments against the warring and erring idolaters, suggesting thereby the ludicrous charge that the early Muslims spread their religion by compelling the non-Muslims to choose between the sword and Islam:

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); But if they repent, and establish regular prayers. And pay zakāh then open the way for them: For Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.²

If this verse and others like it are studied in their context, it becomes clear that they urge Muslims to fight only such warring non-Muslims as wage war against them, drive them out of their houses on account of their faith and cheat them under cover up friendship with them. For instance, an objective study of the circumstances under which the chapter on Immunity was revealed conclusively proves that the punishment contained in verse 5 of this chapter as quoted above related only to such non-Muslims as cheated, persecuted and killed the Muslims after having once entered into treaties

¹*The Qur’ān*, 5:33.

²Ibid., 9: 5.

of defense with them. Obviously, such liberal treatment of an enemy by his adversary is hard to find elsewhere. And the commandments contained in this following verse provide the most convincing evidence regarding peace and self-defense being the immediate and ultimate objectives of the Islamic war. The verse reads as follows: "If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure, that is because they are men without knowledge."¹ So the sole object of all the 'Islamic wars' is to maintain an atmosphere where administration of justice, freedom of conscience and implementation of principles of peaceful co-existence may be effectively ensured. Islam rejects the use of force to convert non-Muslims to Islam. Almighty Allah says in a verse that has been referred to earlier: "There is no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects Tagut and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks...."² However, Islam's call for peace does not mean giving in to enmity and tyranny, and letting evil deeds and injustice go unspoken against and giving in to immorality or any such behavior which is a violation of human life which Almighty Allah has based its *shari'ah* (Islamic law). Through this *Shari'ah*, Islam considers that the basic attitude of man is his inclination toward peace, and that recourse to war occurs only in absolutely necessary situations. Evidence for such a position is clear in the prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) call to Muslims to avoid wishing for fighting, and to be firm when they are led into fighting. He (SAAS) said: "Do not wish to fight your enemy and ask for God's forgiveness, if you do encounter him, call the Name of God and be firm."³ As such he (SAAS) considers war a violation of peace and thus a crime, as long as there are no particular situations which call for war and which make it fair and legitimate. This is exactly what various modern

¹Ibid., 9: 6.

²Ibid., 2: 256.

³*Al-Bukhari*, H. No. 3025.

international treaties agree with. To mention only one of these treaties we can refer to the United Nations charter, which urges nations to solve their differences through peaceful means, and to avoid the use of violence and threats in order to preserve international peace, security and justice. This is also what makes this charter prohibit war except in situations of legitimate defense as has been defined in Article 51, which stipulates that:

There is nothing in this charter that weakens or curtails the natural right of nations, be they individual or groups, to defend themselves should an armed force attack any one of the members of the United Nations, until the Security Council takes the necessary measures to keep international peace and security.¹

Therefore, Islam advocates that wars should have as a purpose to fight all the situations of the violation of the nature of such law, and to defend its sound values, starting with legitimate defense concerning the individual, his family and his belongings and also the defense of one's society, nation and creed, in order to preserve one's sacred values from being violated and for the protection of the individual and group entity from being violated and ridiculed. If the enemies of Islam have considered the Muslim war as a sacred war which arouses terror and fear in the minds and hearts of non-Muslims, the reality of these wars in the Islamic context makes them synonymous with war and fighting with the aim of defending oneself, one's rights and one's religion. That is why the nation was addressed in such a way as it is a nation (*Ummah*) with a mission and a purpose. This does not mean that it is a belligerent religion as it was interpreted by some adversary thinkers. There are even some defenders who believe that by

¹Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. 12 Jan. 2010. 26 Feb. 2010.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapter_VII_of_the_United_Nations_Charter#Article_51

making such statements they make Islam look stronger. Even had it been the religion of wars and swords, it would have vanished soon after the end of the heyday of its leading states and would not have stayed alive in the minds of people. *Jihād* in Islam has various dimensions and stages including political activity, the spending of money and such activities which are resorted to in order to secure one's rights and to react to aggression and to save one's honour. The noblest kind of *Jihād* is the fight against one's lustful desires, idiosyncrasies and greed. From the point of view of Islam, 'holy fighting' involves the person's heart and tongue, and only after that does it involve one's property and one's self. 'Holy fighting' which calls upon the self is always linked with one's property. Almighty Allah says: "Go ye forth, (whether equipped) lightly or heavily, and strive and struggle, with your goods and your persons, in the Cause of Allah...."¹ Yet, the first verse which allowed *qital* ('holy fighting') linked it with the fight against injustice, as it states:

To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged;— and verily, Allah is Most Powerful for their aid ;—(they are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right,—(for no cause) except that they say, "Our Lord is Allah"....²

The meaning is implicit in the verse that is sanction is given to fight. This meaning is confirmed in another verse, in which Almighty Allah states: "Fighting is prescribed upon you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth and ye know not."³ For this reason, Islam has given the utmost importance to 'holy fighting' involving one's self and money. It has also considered this kind of fighting to

¹*The Qur'ān*, 9: 41.

²Ibid., 22: 39-40.

³Ibid., 2: 216.

be better valued than both the major and minor pilgrimage and all kinds of extra worship, be it in the form of prayers or fasting. In order to highlight such a value, it will be sufficient to quote Almighty Allah's following saying:

O ye who believe! Shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from a grievous Chastisement?—That ye believe in Allah and His Messenger, and that ye strive (your utmost) in the Cause of Allah, with your wealth and your persons: That will be best for you, if ye but knew! He will forgive you your sins, and admit you to Gardens beneath which rivers flow, and to beautiful Mansions in Gardens of Eternity: that is indeed the supreme Triumph. And another (favour will He bestow), which ye do love,—help from Allah and a speedy victory. So give the Glad Tidings to the Believers.¹

The prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said: “The highest of faith in Islam is fighting for the cause of God.”² He (SAAS) also said: “There are two kinds of eyes which are not harmed by hell’s fire: one kind is that which has cried from the fear of God and the other is that which has spent the night watching out for the cause of God.”³ In spite of all this, when the Muslim state is led to war, such a situation has idealistic and human laws, conditions, regulations, and ethics which govern it. This is clearly stated by the prophet Muhammad (SAAS): “Conquer in the name of God, for the cause of God, fight those who do not believe in God; conquer but do not exaggerate or betray, and do not maim or kill an infant.”⁴ He (SAAS) also said: “Go and

¹Ibid., 61: 10-3.

²*Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal*, H. No. 22104 & *As-Sagir ul-Jamiah*, H. No. 5742.

³*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, H. No. 1639.

⁴*Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal*, H. No. 23080 & *Lil Albani Abu Dawood*, H. No. 2613.

fight in the name of God and for the cause of God. Fight those who do not believe in God, without betraying them, or exaggerating, or maiming. And do not kill infants or monks.”¹ The prophet Muhammad (SAAS) also said: “Do not kill an old weak man, or a small child or a woman.”² These laws also comprise the aftermath of war including what concerns the prisoners of war, which the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) summarizes in his noble saying: “I am the messenger of mercy, but I am also the messenger of fierce battles.”³ This is an important aspect which has been dealt with quite profusely by the Muslim jurisprudence. The Righteous Guided Caliphs (RA) have followed the same path as that of the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) in this domain. The first one of them is Abū Bakr as-Siddīq (RA) who advised Yazīd bin Sufyān, the Commander of the Syrian army as follows:

...I would like to give you ten pieces of advice:
do not kill a woman, or a child, or an old man,
do not cut a fruitful tree, do not destroy a
shelter, do not kill a sheep or a camel except for
eating it, do not burn or sever any palm trees, do
not enslave the defeated and be not a coward.⁴

In Makkah, the infidels were inflicting great deal of oppression on Muslims that it was hard for Muslims to live in Makkah. The Muslims did not find any relaxation after their migration to Habshah (Ethiopia) and Madīnah. They were continuously victims of conspiracies hatched by the infidels and the hypocrites. Even the enemies invaded Madīnah with a huge army with intention of ravaging Madīnah and destroying Muslims. So, Muslims were left with no option except to defend the sword with sword. In the long run, they were

¹Ibid.

²Abū Dāwūd, H. No. 2672.

³Lit-Tirmidhi al-Muhammadiyat ush-Shamail, H. No. 362.

⁴As-Suyuti, *Tanwīr Al-Hawālik Sharh ‘ala Muwatta’ Malik*, n.d., vol. 2, pp. 6-7.

ordained by Allah as mentioned in the 39th and 40th verses of the chapter 22 in the Qur’ān. Thus, on one hand, *jihād* was allowed to fight against injustice and oppression, while on the other Muslims were asked to behave with tolerance and good conduct.

Areas of Mutual Concern:

The scope of dialogue is almost unlimited. Once in practice in an honest and sincere manner it can open doors of mutual understanding and cooperation in virtually every field of human endeavor, not just the faith. It is stated in the Qur’ān: “...Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancor: Fear Allah: for Allah is strict in punishment.”¹ Today, people are talking about many things: the danger of war and frequent clashes all over the world, water and air pollution, hunger, the increasing erosion of moral values, and so on. As a result, many other concerns have come to the fore: peace, contentment, ecology, justice, tolerance, and dialogue. According to M. Fethullah Gulen:

Regardless of how their adherents implement their faith in their daily lives, such generally accepted values as love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, peace, brotherhood, and freedom are all values exalted by religion. Most of these values are accorded the highest precedence in the messages brought by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, upon them be peace, as well as in the messages of Buddha and even Zarathustra, Lao-Tzu, Confucius, and Hindu prophets.²

King ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abdulazīz at 9th Makkah conference stated in a cogent and moving speech that decried religious

¹*The Qur’ān*, 5:2.

²M. Fethullah Gulen, op. cit.

extremism and called for renewed efforts at serious dialogue.¹ He said:

Mankind is suffering today from a loss of values and conceptual confusion, and is passing through a critical phase which, in spite of all the scientific progress, is witnessing a proliferation of crime, an increase in terrorism, the disintegration of the family, subversion of the minds of the young by drug abuse, exploitation of the poor by the strong, and odious racist tendencies. There is no solution for us other than to agree on a united approach, through dialogue among religions and civilizations.²

Talking about the dangerous use of technology, William Montgomery Watt has to say:

In the last decade or two it has also come to be realized that uninhabited applications of technology on a large scale and in all sorts of fields are endangering all life on this planet. This does not touch the religions directly, but the problems are now so vast that they can only be solved by international action. The religions have a part to play here in formulating norms of conduct for the use of dangerous technology, and in helping each nation to make a firm resolve to act in this way.³

¹Syed Neaz Ahmad in '*The Muslim World League*', Dr. Hassan Al-Ahdal, Ed., Muslim World League, Makkah Mukarramah, vol. 37, No. 1, Muharram 1430-January 2009, p. 22.

²Ibid.

³*Muslim-Christian encounters Perceptions and misperceptions*, op. cit., p. 99.

Religions inculcate moral values in individuals that go a long way in keeping them away from violence and impingement of others' rights. But preaching alone is not enough. Deterrent punishments are the need of the time if the crime rates are to be effectively reduced.¹ Trying to have readers focus on Qazi Rasheed Masood's, Member of Parliament (India), feelings, Dr. Javed Jamil writes:

Rasheed Masood feels extremely concerned about the rise of social evils in society like gambling, immoral sexual practices and alcohol. He feels that "the impact of Westernisation and the projection of evils as status symbols and as something positive have driven people to these evils". He feels that "these evils are evils not only in the minds of Muslims but also in the minds of the followers of all other religions, including Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism". Masood is unequivocal in demanding total ban on all these activities including their sordid commercialization. "Islam has shown us the way", he stresses, "and it is that these evils are not just to be disapproved but to be legally prohibited". And he feels that the saints and priests of other religions must join hands with Muslims in this campaign. Similarly, crimes too have to be tackled through an effective law and policingMasod [Masood] thinks it is extremely important to discuss riots and terrorism together. "Riots cause much bigger terror than a few terrorist attacks here and there". "I think", he advises, "riots based on religious hatred can easily be prevented if all communities believe and follow the essence of their respective religions. Scriptures are never

¹*Islam, Muslims & the World*, op. cit., pp. 40-1.

supportive of hatred and violence.” He criticizes those Muslim and Hindu leaders who spread hatred against other communities and advises them to go back to their religious books to learn lessons of compassion and tolerance. He lambastes the government, the executive and the media for spreading the notion that terrorism is the monopoly of Muslims. This has had a terrible effect on the psyche of Muslim masses. He says that it is high time the role of Hindutva based organizations like Bajrang Dal, VHP and Shiv Sena was investigated with the sincerity it deserves.¹

Further, it has been stated in the same Magazine:

The former Union Health Minister has lots of complaints about the impact of growing westernization on health. He is of the view that “prevention should be the motto of the health policies rather than the cure.” He feels extremely perturbed by the rise of AIDS in the country and holds Western influences responsible for this. He stresses that strengthening of traditional Indian family system and acceptance of Islamic prohibitions in personal lives are the only solutions to the problem of AIDS, which would otherwise kill tens of millions of Indians in the next decade. His face exhibits plenty of anger and anguish when he is reminded of the Maharashtra Bill to legalise live in relationships. “Those who talk of legalizing live in and gay marriages are only playing in the hands of those for whom business

¹Ibid.

is more important than morality”, is his categorical statement.¹

Similarly there are issues related with Muslims only, one has to tackle with them so that peace will be promoted rather than hatred. Talking about the Middle East, Mike Ghouse of USA writes:

We have had bad policies in the Middle East for the last sixty years, we cannot continue with them for another sixty, it is time to change now and yes we can. Peace in Middle East is a reality if justice to both the parties is ensured. We need to be a catalyst for a realizable hope for Palestinians and genuine security for the Israelis, where both people can drop their guards and feel safe. Sixty years have gone by because of the policies of Palestinian, Israeli and American leadership. It has to change; the “Justness” element has to be included now.²

The justice above mentioned must be accepted to Muslims, it must not be again a thrust on them as it was in its initial phase. Any kind of agreement must be acceptable to them. In his book, *An Ethic for Enemies*, Donald Shriver points out that:

The twentieth century involved more violence, more human bloodshed, more refugees and displaced persons, more genocide and ethnic cleansing, and more human suffering than any century in human history. As a result, the global village is populated with wounded nations, which means that the twenty-first century

¹Ibid., p. 41.

²Ibid., p. 17.

promises to be the most dangerous century in all of human history.¹

Talking about the contemporary world, Dr. Javed Jamil writes:

We belong to a world where immorality reigns. Where, it is easier to be bad than a good. Where piety is ridiculed and impudence glorified. Where, prosperity is considered to be the synonym of peace, education that of knowledge and entertainment that of happiness. Where, children are aborted in the name of women's rights. Where, murderers and rapists are protected in the name of 'right of life'. Where, criminals are given all amenities of life in the name of human rights. Where, sexual perverts receive all kinds of sympathy and attention. Where, those talking of righteousness in life are condemned as "bloody moralists".²

In this kind of atmosphere those who are trying to promote peace must see what are the root causes of these chaos and confusions and see what can be done in order to make an atmosphere where every individual will feel peace and security as far as his self, property, family etc. is concerned.

Aims, Objectives and Orientations:

The pluralistic nature of Islam is evident from the fact that the duty of a Muslim is only educating and passing the knowledge of Islam, near and far. Thus the Qur'ān states: "And admonish thy nearest kinsmen."³ The responsibility ends with educating, transmitting and communicating faith. To pass on the message is to call and invite people to the way of Allah. Conversion is

¹See Canon Brian Cox, op. cit., p. 83.

²*Islam, Muslims & the World*, op. cit., p. 4.

³*The Qur'ān*, 26: 214.

something that only Allah can alone accomplish. It is an affair of the heart and does not lie within anyone else's purview and jurisdiction. It is only the prerogative of Allah (SWT). This is the real meaning of—*Litakūnū Shuhadā 'Ala al-Nās*—bear witness to the message before mankind. The pluralistic nature of Islam is further established by its principle of justice in all circumstances, in relation to Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Thus the Qur'ān states:

O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witness to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from Justice. Be just: that is next to Piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.¹

The principle of justice in Islam constitutes the fundamental norm after faith in the oneness of Allah (*Tawhīd*). This principle takes precedence over one's own interest, the interest of relatives, interest of race, interest of nations and so on. If, for example, Muslims are called to participate in a war that is unjust or based solely on the longing for power, conquer land or control of territory of resources and other interests, they should not take part in such a war. Muslims are not allowed to fight for money, wealth or resources, grab power or occupy territory. They must avoid oppressive war. Muslims cannot participate in unjust war, whatever is the identity or religion of the enemy. Belonging to particular faith does not mean that Muslims are required to accept or support injustice simply because it is committed by another member of the same faith. On the contrary, Muslims, according to the teachings of Islam, are required to oppose and even stop such injustice even if it is committed by another Muslim. Thus the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said:

¹Ibid., 5: 8.

“Help your brother whether he is unjust or the victim of injustice”. One of the companions asked: “O Messenger of Allah. I understand helping someone who is the victim of injustice, but how should I help one who is unjust?” The prophet replied: “Prevent him from being unjust. That is how you will help him.”¹

Another Hadīth reports prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said: “Whoever of you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hands; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart—and that is the weakest of faith.”² The prophet Muhammad (SAAS) has been also reported to have said:

Every one of you is a shephered and each shephered is responsible for his herd, the king is responsible for his subjects as the father is responsible for his family, and the woman is responsible for her husband and his children, so every one of you is a shephered and each one of you is responsible for his herd.³

There is no doubt that when a person is aware that he is in charge of a responsibility, be it big or small, for which he is accountable before Allah and about which there is no trickery and for which there is no escaping divine justice, the sense of righteousness and fairness settles in his mind and conscience. When this sense becomes part of the person’s spirit, then justice prevails, injustice is eradicated and solidarity is generalized.

¹*Al-Bukhari*, H. No. 2443 & *Al-Muslim*, H. No. 6747.

²*Al-Muslim*, H. No. 186. See also *Muslim* quoted in An-Nawawi’s *forty Hadith*, Tr. Ezzedin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies, Holy Quran Publishing House, Damascus, 1977, p. 110.

³*Al-Bukhari*, H. No. 2409 & *Al-Muslim*, H. No. 4828.

Dialogue is a must today, and the first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones. It is essential that participants in a dialogue are thoroughly familiar with their own religious traditions. Secondly, the aim must be to acquire as much knowledge about the religion of the other as possible. Dr. John J. DeGioia, President of Georgetown University, Washington says: "Dialogue can increase knowledge and trust, point to both commonalities and differences, and frame joint efforts to address the pressing global challenges of the new millennium."¹ Taha Jabir al-Alwani has to say:

Globalization has proved that no ideology can control the whole world. As the last two centuries have shown, Christianity cannot overcome other religions, especially Islam and Judaism, and neither can Islam defeat Christianity and Judaism. Finally, humanity has managed to discover this truth. As a result, those who follow current events cannot help but believe that humanity needs to review such things as the ideological roots belonging to religions, their interpretations, and how their followers understand their particular religions. Therefore, the only choice is to go back to the core and absolute ethics on which people do not differ, even if they take different routes to prove and interpret them. These shared ethics are the real and only guarantee to which people should refer and upon which people can build a strong relationship among the extended human family, which descends from one father and one mother and which makes the whole Earth its home—a home that should be safe from destruction and

¹*Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue*, op. cit., p. 7.

conflict. These shared ethics come from the truth, the good, beauty, human unity, the unity of creation, equality among people, the necessity of freedom for men and women, and the necessity of Justice to organize their lives.

If these shared ethics could be adopted and presented to humanity so that all people could understand and implement them in their lives, then humanity would adopt them. That is why ideologues are asked to use their ideologies in ways that support these ethics and convince other people to adhere to them. If this were done, opportunities for understanding among people would arise, religious thought would become equal to worldly ('almāniyah) thought, and humanity would reach ever-higher levels of global progress instead of disagreement and conflict. Therefore, reformers, philosophers, and intellectuals should look into these common ethics, shed light on them, build awareness about them, and avoid opposing them, undermining their importance, or ignoring them by forcing other ideologies into conflict with them. In addition, these shared ethics would put everyone on the same level in every aspect and then produce effective tools for building the necessary common ground.¹

Interfaith dialogue is to hold one's faith and, at the same time, to understand others' faiths. It demands honesty and respect from its participants, so they may present their faith sincerely rather than hypocritically. Uniformity and agreement are not the goals, but collaboration and combining our different

¹Taha jabir al-Alwani, 'Reflections on the "Moderate Muslims" Debate', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, op. cit., p. 115.

strengths for the welfare of humanity. Jaco Cilliers, a practitioner of interfaith dialogue, stresses that:

Engaging in interfaith dialogue does not in any way mean undermining one's own faith or religious tradition. Indeed, interfaith dialogue is constructive only when people become firmly grounded in their own religious traditions and through that process gain a willingness to listen and respect the beliefs of other religions.¹

The purpose of dialogue is to struggle against negative conditioning and fanaticism and to open the door for listening, communicating, and respect.² And according to “Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims”:

The purpose of interfaith dialogue is not to create a new religion or to give up on the fundamentals of Islam, but to create a peaceful atmosphere for coexistence. Imams could be teachers, guides on this path of dialogue, for both intra-Muslim and interfaith dialogue. Our participation in the interfaith dialogue will provide the framework to allow us to:

- Re-learn the art of listening to each other in small or large groups;
- Comprehend intellectually our similarities and differences through theological and philosophical discussion;

¹Colliers, Jaco. “Building Bridges for Interfaith Dialogue,” in *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, Smock, David R. Ed., United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, 2002, p. 49.

²Mike Leterfield, ‘The necessity of Dialogue’, in *Fountain, A magazine of critical, scientific, and spiritual thought*, November 27, July-September 1999.

- Value the spirituality of others by learning about different faiths through stories and narratives;
- Work together on joint projects at local and global levels to bring greater justice, humanitarian aid, and peace to society;
- Operate in a peaceful atmosphere to provide charitable and human service programs for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.¹

Dialogue seeks to overcome hostility by the practice of unconditional love toward others, including one's enemies. It works for the peaceful resolution of conflicts between individuals and groups. Dialogue is for exercise forgiveness and repentance as individuals and communities to create the possibility of a better future together. In the Qur'ān, *Sūrah* (chapter) 24 verse 22, provides a sobering admonition that if the person of faith expects forgiveness from Allah, they must be willing to bestow it on others. Furthermore, the Qur'ān teaches that one of the names and attributes of Allah (SWT) is 'All Forgiving, Most Merciful' (59:10). Muhammad (SAAS) embodied this teaching in his act of forgiveness towards his enemies in Makkah. The ethical implications of Dialogue, according to Canon Brian Cox are:

1. The pluralistic vision of community: we seek unity in the midst of diversity.
2. Compassionate inclusion: we seek to overcome hostility by the practice of unconditional love toward others, including one's enemies.
3. Peacemaking: we seek the peaceful resolution of conflicts between individuals and groups.

¹*Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, op. cit., p. 12.

4. Social justice: we seek the common good through transformation of the soul of a community.
5. Forgiveness: we exercise forgiveness and repentance as individuals and communities to create the possibility of a better future together.
6. Healing: we seek to heal the wounds of history through acknowledgement of suffering and injustice.
7. Acknowledging God's sovereignty: we seek as individuals and communities to acknowledge God's authority through submission and surrender.
8. Atonement with God: we seek to find peace with God and become people of faith.¹

Further, talking about pluralism, Canon Brian Cox says:

For pluralism to move from being merely descriptive to being a principle or core value, there must be an intentionality of action through the building of bridges. Bridge building means developing the tangible and intangible strands of connectedness among diverse people groups, in a community or state, so that they can live together in peace and seek the common good of the whole community. Bridge building reflects the fact that reconciliation systems have an identifiable architecture for knotting together the diverse elements of a modern society.

Bridges have inspired poets, novelists, artists, and photographers through the ages. They bring together two pieces of geography, sometimes

¹Canon Brian Cox, op. cit., p. 17.

two worlds that otherwise might not come together and be enriched by each other. The construction of a bridge begins at both ends and, finally meets in the middle of a span. Building bridges is an apt metaphor in the area of human relationships, whether between two individuals or two nations, and it is absolutely essential in order to forge unity out of diversity. Thus, a pluralistic society or state is predicated upon a proactive effort to build bridges.

The architecture of bridge building develops in discreet stages. Social bridge building focuses on relationships. It deals with feelings, attitudes, opinions, and perceptions and is a means to engendering a new social fabric through activities such as dialogues, exchanges, and community-building activities.¹

Dr. Louise Diamond, formerly of the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, offers a number of insights about the dialogue process. She points out:

Dialogue is particularly essential with those whom we may think that we have the greatest differences. The purpose of dialogue is not to advocate, but to inquire; not to argue, but to explore; and not to convince, but to discover. Dialogue serves a very different purpose than debate. There is room in every society for debate about public policy issues that allow divergent points of view to be expressed and advocated. Debate empowers us to think through complex issues for ourselves and arrive at thoughtful conclusions. However, true

¹Ibid., pp. 30-1.

dialogue seeks to create a safe space in a context of respect that allows individuals or groups to share their perspectives on difficult, controversial, or explosive issues. In a true dialogue, there is an implicit agreement that the purpose is learning and to deepen understanding of “the other”. The simple structure of statement, reflection, and clarification can enable a truly respectful environment to exist between individuals or groups, where there is an existing or potential antagonism.¹

Dialogues, no matter which directions they may go into, or how offensive they can turn, can certainly lead to a form of consensus. To bridge the divide between East and West, the war should be ended. We are standing on the verge of a new era. Let us write history and let not history write us off. According to Dr. Javed Jamil:

With the imminent fall of the US as the Superpower, time has come when the people of the world must have a fresh look at the things. All the right minded people, including the followers of all religions, especially Christianity, Hinduism, Budhism and Islam, the four most followed religions of the world, must come together against the vices afflicting the mankind. We must not just aim to achieve prosperity; we must vow to restore peace. Prosperity in itself is not bad. The only conditions are that it should not be achieved at the cost of peace and it should be shared by all, not the privileged few.²

Archbishop Lajolo says:

¹Ibid., p. 35.

²*Islam, Muslims & the World*, op. cit., p. 5.

A conflict of cultures, or worse still, religions, could divide people even more than they are already divided; Interreligious dialogue aims at a better understanding of the faith of others and at making one's own faith better known, as well as reinforcing mutual bonds of personal respect....It does not aim to make those who participate in it less faithful to their own profound religious convictions, but to open minds and hearts ever more to the will of God.¹

The promise of a world of peace and prosperity will depend as much on our norms and principles as upon formal rules and institutions. Universal principles inform basic ideals of universal brotherhood and compassion for all humankind, and are expressed at the core of the great world religions. Of the verses that emphasize these principles in the Qur'ān, this is the most well known:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).²

Our differences, this critical verse suggests, can be a catalyst for learning, cooperation, and respect—not a cause for strife. Only in this spirit of mutual respect can human beings effectively apply universal principles to specific problems and challenges. Dialogue should not be on the fundamentals of religions rather, it should be on matters common between two

¹A Statement made by Archbishop Lajolo, of Indonesia on 4-21-2006. See *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, op. cit., p. 108.

²*The Qur'ān*, 49: 13.

groups. Dialogue should not aim at attack, nor at defense, rather, it should aim at creating environments of co-existence.

The results of the interfaith dialogue is neither visible nor penetrative because it is a cloistered activity carried on by the elitists of different religious groups and those elitists have no (or less) influence at the grassroots level. The UNO is a truly representative body of the nation-states of the world and its schemes have a fair chance of being implemented through the governments. Muslims does not have a global representative institution similar to the Vatican or the Anglican Church. The scholars of Saudi Arabia may talk to the emissaries of the Vatican but they do not carry the authority and the clout for global acceptance among the Muslims as the later do among the millions of the Roman Catholics. Furthermore, according to M. Abdul Haq Ansari:

We should welcome the dialogue provided it is aimed at and meant for solving the common problems faced by both communities, Muslims and Christians [or, for that matter, by the followers of different religious traditions]. The exercise may be useful for resolving misunderstandings emanating from misinformation. However, the purpose of any such dialogue should be ascertained before engaging in the exercise. One cannot decide about participation in any dialogue before knowing its intent and content and without understanding the objects that are to be achieved.¹

Dr. Ismā'īl Rājī al Fārūqī discussing about dialogue says:

¹*Radiance viewsweekly*, vol. No. XLV, Issue No. 31, n.d., New Delhi, 24 Feb.-1 March 2008, p. 16.

No dialogue can succeed where one party is “host” and the others are “invited guests”. Every party must be host and feel itself so. Every party must feel absolutely free to speak its own mind, free of both burdens at once: that of obligation to the other party, as well as that of loyalty to one’s organization or government. There can be no “upper hand” and “lower hand” in dialogue; all “hands” must be equal. Moreover, candid respect of the other faiths by each party is equally a necessity.¹

Dialogue is always relevant. Human nature demands that they talk to each other and try to settle out differences through dialogue instead of using force. But it does not mean that they can ever reach a stage when there will be no differences and all humans will have just one faith or worldview. Difference is also in the nature of humans. Holders of any view believe that the truth lies with them (why else would they hold that view?). It is the dialogue that helps each differing group to contemplate upon and examine its beliefs and change its position, if convinced of the truth of its opponent.

Etiquette of Dialogue:

Since dialogue involves different individuals or group of individuals who try to understand each others position regarding their religio-cultural positions, it needs certain rules and special ethics. Different scholars have highlighted and formulated the basic ethics for a person who is interested in a purposeful dialogue. Ismā’īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, for example, has set the following set of rules:

¹Al Fārūqī, Ismā’īl Rājī, Ed., *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, Second Edition, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, Virginia, USA, 1986, Foreword.

- **No religious pronouncement is beyond the reach of criticism:** ...no man should speak with silencing authority. Divine revelation is authoritative, but not authoritarian. Man's understanding of the revelation must be based on rational argument and logical understanding. It must not be incomprehensible, irrational, esoteric, or secret.
- **Internal coherence must exist:** All discourse should be intelligible, not paradoxical. Paradox is legitimate when it is not offered as a final truth; otherwise such discourse will be unintelligible.
- **Proper historical perspective must be maintained:** Dialogue must take into consideration person's religious history and context. Past history must not be considered as redundant, but rather its genuine understanding leads to a successful dialogue.
- **Correspondence with reality must exist:** Dialogue will be better if it takes into consideration the physical, ethical, and religious sensitivities and reality of participants, who also should be able to articulate such reality.
- **Freedom from absolutized scriptural interpretations:** There is a diversity of opinions in approaching religious texts in all religions. Disputes and contentions surround these interpretations for many centuries. A considerable freedom is necessary in dialogue when addressing these multiple interpretations; this can ensure the greatest possible tolerance for

the current contextual issues to be voiced.

- **Dialogue should be carried in areas where there is a greater possibility of success, e.g. in the field of ethical duties:** Participants can emphasize that mutual understanding can be achieved in the field of ethical, moral, family and issues of social justice in the service of humanity despite the theological differences....¹

The etiquettes and manners for dialogue can easily be discerned. However, the scholars have worked hard to formulate important ones. Leonard Swidler puts forth some of these as below:

1. The purpose of dialogue is to learn and increase understanding;
2. Participants should be engaged in the dialogue within each religious community, and with other religious communities, i.e. both in intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue; these should take place simultaneously;
3. Participants in dialogue should participate with honesty and sincerity and with a wish to learn and grow together with respect;
4. In dialogue, we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather our ideals be compared with the other's ideals and our practice be compared with the other's practice;
5. Each dialogue partner has the right to define his/her own faith and what he/she believes

¹Al Fārūqī, Ismā‘il Rājī in *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, op. cit., pp. 34-5.

in. The rest can describe only what it looks like to them from the outside;

6. Participants in dialogue should not come to dialogue with pre-assumed and prefixed points in the areas of disagreement but with the sincere intention to listen to others with openness;
7. Dialogue can take place between equals only and therefore one shall not try to dominate or treat the other as inferior;
8. Dialogue must take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust;
9. Participants entering into dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious tradition; and
10. Participants in dialogue should attempt to experience how others' traditions affect them holistically (i.e. not in certain aspects only).¹

It is only by following such principles that dialogue could be fruitful. A person interested in a successful dialogue should remember the following points:

- That we use our creative imaginations and our sensitivity for persons [concerned];
- That all traditions engaged in dialogue be involved in its initial planning;
- That the most difficult points of differences should not be tackled in the early stage of dialogue, but rather that commonalities be treated first for trust building and gaining respect;

¹Leonard Swidler in Ibid, pp. 33-4.

- That when comparing our own ideals with a partner's ideals, the objectives should be to learn not to win; wanting to win totally defeats the purpose of dialogue;
- That participants in dialogue should keep the dialogue as a two-way communication where no individual or group shall dominate.¹

Certain other norms could, however, be added to the list. These are being polite and gentle, speaking softly, not speaking ill of others, avoiding direct criticism of others, not compromising on the basic principles of one's faith, suppressing anger, observing patience, giving humane treatment, smiling and laughing gently, attending to the speaking person, being alert, avoiding continuous speaking, being ready to community work, being punctual and observing cleanliness.²

¹Richard Landau in Ibid, p. 35.

²See Ibid, pp. 30-3.

CHAPTER III

DIALOGUE IN THE ISLAMIC TRADITION

Dialogue is a conversation among persons or groups to know one another. It is a socio-psychological necessity of man to express his self vis-à-vis the social environment. Discussion, interaction, exchange of ideas, agreements, ...etc. are various forms of dialogue. The phenomenon had been existing from early times of human civilization. Religion also guides and fashions it in its own way. Islam that constitutes Allah's final and perfect religion is deeply concerned with the emancipation of an individual being in this macrocosmic fabric of society. Dialogue plays an important role in it. It serves as a peaceful and effective means to respect others and make the message of Islam accessible to them. The last and final prophet and messenger of Allah, Muhammad (SAAS) has made use of dialogue and discourse to recognize the position of the people of other faiths vis-à-vis those of Islam for a peaceful co-existence. Since its first inception, Islam, through the prophet Muhammad (SAAS), interacted with non-Muslims. Both during the Madinan and Makkah periods, Islamic teachings guided the early followers in the proper ways of addressing and dealing with non-Muslims.

The two most important Islamic theological sources of teaching are the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth. Both offer abundant examples, stories, and values to support dialogue, both within Islam itself and with the greater faith community. The Qur'ān enjoins the believers to invite others to the faith, and cautions against pointless disputing with them. Different revelations had been given to different peoples, but they are expected to recognize the divine source of Islam and to heed its invitation. "To every People have We appointed rites which they must follow: let them not then dispute with thee on the matter, but do thou invite (them) to thy Lord: for thou art assuredly on the Right

Way.”¹ What is of interest in this verse is that despite the affirmation of the fact that the rites of different people have been divinely prescribed, they are not to dispute with the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) about such things, and he (SAAS) is ordered to call them to the Lord. So, the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) is to call people to whom previous rites were prescribed and they are not to argue with him (SAAS) about it. “Thus have We made of you an Ummat justly balanced. That ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves....”² Here the universality of Islam is implied by the idea that the Muslims are to bear witness to all mankind, rather than to the people of a specific time or place. A scholar elaborates the point as:

Further proof that the message of the Qur’ān is addressed to humanity in its totality, and not only the humanity at large in seventh century Arabia, may be found in the Prophet’s own understanding of his mission, expressed in his dispatch of emissaries to Byzantium and Persia with letters proclaiming the universal call to Islam.

Consider, for example, the following letter reportedly sent to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius:

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate
 From: Muhammad, servant of Allah and His prophet.
 To: Heraclius the Great of Byzantium.
 Peace be to those who follow guidance.
 I invite you with the invitation of Islam. If you submit it is to your benefit, for if you submit

¹The Qur’ān, 22: 67.

²Ibid, 2: 143.

Allah will give you two rewards. If you turn this down, then upon you will be the error of your peasants. (O People of the Book! Come to a word between us and between you that we worship none but Allah and shall not associate anything with Him and some of us shall not take others for lords other than Allah. And if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims.)

[seal:] Allah
 Rasūl
 Muhammad

Not only does this letter show that the Prophet understood his calling as a universal mission, not to be confined to any particular cultural context, it also shows that he understood the message of the Qur'ān to be likewise universal, speaking not only to the People of the Book on the Arabian peninsula, but in distant lands as well.¹

Furthermore, according to M. Fethullah Gulen:

In the Qur'ān God says: "This is the Book; wherein there is no doubt; a guidance to those who fear God" (2:2). Later it is explained that these pious ones are those: "Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; and who believe in what is sent to you and what was sent before you, and (in their hearts) have the reassurance of the Hereafter" (2:3-4). At the very outset, using a very soft and slightly

¹Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, Alhoda publishers and Distributors, London, 1999, pp. 138-40.

oblique style, the Qur'ān calls people to accept the former Prophets and their Books. Having such a condition at the very beginning of the Qur'ān seems very important to me when it comes to starting a dialogue with the followers of other religions.

In other verse God commands: “And discuss you not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation)” (29:46). In this verse, the Qur'ān describes what method, approach, and manner should be used. Bediuzzaman's view of the form and style of debate are extremely significant: “Anyone who is happy about his opponent's defeat in debate is without mercy.” He explains further: “You do not gain anything by his defeat. If you were defeated and he was victorious, then you would have corrected one of your mistakes.” Debate should not be for the sake of our ego, but to enable the truth to come out.¹

Fourteen centuries ago, Islam made the greatest ecumenical call the world has ever seen. The Qur'ān calls the people of the Book (Christians and Jews primarily):

Say: “O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than Allah.” If then they turn back, say ye: “Bear witness that

¹Gulen, M. Fethullah, “The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective”, *Fountain* volume 3, Issue 31, 2000, 25 June 2009, <http://pghdialogue.org/index.php?Itemid=41&id=1&option=com_content&task=view>.

we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)."¹

This call, coming in the ninth year of the *Hijrah*, begins with the “*lā* (no!)” in the statement of faith, “*Lā ilāha illa Allāh* (there is no god but Allah).” More than a command to do something positive, it was a call not to do certain things so that followers of the revealed religions could overcome their separation from each other. It represented the widest statement on which members of all religions could agree. In case this call was rejected, Muslims were to adopt the attitude expressed in another chapter of the Qur’ān: “To you be your Way, and to me mine.”² That is, if you do not accept this call, we have surrendered to Allah. We will continue on the path we have accepted and leave you to go on your path. Elmalili Hamdi Yazir, a famous Turkish interpreter of the Qur’ān, made the following interesting observations regarding this verse:

It has been shown how various consciences, nations, religions, and books can unite in one essential conscience and word of truth, and how Islam has taught the human realm such a wide, open, and true path of salvation and law of freedom. It has been shown fully that this is not limited to the Arab or non-Arab. Religious progress is possible not by consciences being narrow and separate from each other, but by their being universal and broad.³

Islam gave as a gift this breadth of conscience, this broad path of salvation, and this law of freedom. Furthermore, Waris Mazhari, adding to this point says:

¹The Qur’ān, 3: 64.

²Ibid, 109: 6.

³Elmalili Hamdi Yazir, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Ist., vol. 2, pp. 1131-2 in “The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective”, op.cit.

I feel that dialogue, for the sake both of tabligh as well as promoting communal harmony, must not be limited simply to theological discussions and exchanges between religious specialists. Equally important is the need for practical action for the sake of the poor and the marginalized, irrespective of religion. Islam positively commands Muslims to help the needy, no matter what their faith. Even prior to his being appointed by God as a prophet, Muhammad is said to have been actively involved in assisting the poor of Mecca, all of who were at that time non-Muslims. He played a key role in a committee set up by the Qur'aish, the hulf-i fizul, to help the needy. Likewise, after the Prophet shifted to Medina, he drew up a charter with the Jews and polytheists of the town, according to which all the denizens of the town, irrespective of religion, were to cooperate with each other for common purposes such as defence.¹

Therefore, dialogue is not limited simply to exchange of views between the dialoguing groups about their religious beliefs rather it goes beyond that as well. This point has been elaborated by Prof. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi as:

Explaining the teachings of one's own religion and understanding the beliefs of others is, of course, a central element of the dialogue process. But there is another level of dialogue which Islam teaches us about—the need for people of different religious communities to act

¹Waris Mazhari, “Hindu-Muslim Relations and Intra-Muslim Sectarian Disputes in India”, in svAbhinava, 2009. 15 Dec. 2009, <<http://www.svabhinava.org/MeccaBenares/YoginderSikand/WarisMazhariHinduMuslim-frame.php>>

together to attain certain desirable social goals. This is dialogue at the level of social action. Thus, when the Prophet Muhammad [peace and Allah's blessings be upon him] arrived in Madinah, he entered into a pact with the Jews of the town. This pact is remembered in Islamic history as the Misaq-i-Madinah or 'The Treaty of Madinah'. According to this treaty, the Muslims and the Jews were to help each other in times of need and in defending Medina from outside attack. It is on the basis of this pact that some Indian ulama called for a united struggle of Muslims, Hindus and others against British imperialism. What we learn from the example of the Treaty of Madinah is that for the sake of common goals, Muslims can certainly cooperate with others.

The Holy Qur'an explicitly commands us that we should help each other in doing good and in pious deeds and in fighting oppression, but not in assisting each other in sin and oppression. We have an ideal model in this regard in the Holy Prophet Muhammad [peace and Allah's blessings be upon him], who, even before God had announced his Prophethood, had set up an organisation of poor youth in Makkah, called the Half-i-Fuzul, to help the poor and the needy. Now this was a time before the announcement of Muhammad's prophethood, so the other members of the Half-i-Fuzul were all non-Muslims. When the first revelation from God was delivered to the Holy Prophet by the angel Hazrat Jibrail [Gabriel] on Mount Hira, the Prophet was taken aback and he related the incident to his wife, Hazrat Khadijah. She told him not to worry and that God would protect

him as he had always helped the oppressed, the poor, the orphans and widows. Now, at that time, there were no other Muslims in Makkah, and all these people whom the Prophet used to help were, of course, non-Muslims. So, this very clearly suggests that Muslims can and must help the poor and the suffering whoever they might be, and for that they can cooperate with people of good will from other communities. This, too, is a form of dialogue, and it must also be part of any inter-religious dialogue process that Muslims initiate with others.¹

The ability of human beings to moderate their views, however strongly held, to appreciate and respect the uniqueness of the “other”, remains one of the defining qualities of inter-group relations and the primordial basis of mutual co-existence. With the frantic pace of globalization and with greater interaction between peoples, cultures and religions, each struggling to find a respectable niche in the global village, the cultivation of moderation and toleration have become all the more imperative and an incontrovertible indicator of human development. Making this point easy to understand, Mohamed Talbi says:

Is it conceivable for me, as a Muslim, to condemn and hate others just because they disagree with me? Will this make me a better Muslim, more authentic? To accept this premise is wrong. It is quite inconceivable to imagine that God would inspire man to hate His creatures. He who says: ‘Repel (Evil) with what is better: Then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and

¹Rafiabadi, Hamid Naseem, “Islamic Perspective on Inter-Religious Dialogue”, *Islamic Voice*, Monthly, vol. 14-06 No: 162, June 2000/ Rabi-ul-Awal 1421H, 28 Feb. 2007, <<http://islamicvoice.com/june.2000/interview.htm>>.

intimate!' (Qur'ān XLI: 34; trans. A. Yusuf Ali). And in the Hadīth, the tradition emphasizes: 'The whole of mankind is God's family, and among you the most loved by God is he who is the most helpful for His Family.'¹

According to the previous quotation the whole of mankind is God's family. Therefore all mankind are brothers of each other. Furthermore, a famous ḥadīth says: "No one among you will be a true believer as long as he does not desire for his brother what he desires for himself."² In Islamic voice, under the title, 'Islamic Perspective on Inter-Religious Dialogue', Prof. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi says:

The Holy Qur'an tells us that we should not abuse the idols or deities worshipped by others, otherwise they would react and, in turn, abuse God out of ignorance. It commands us to call others to Islam, but there is to be no compulsion at all involved. If someone listens to that call and decides to become a Muslim, well and good. If, on the other hand, he chooses not to accept Islam, that is his own concern, and then, as the Holy Qur'an says, "to them their religion and to you your religion". The Holy Qur'an very clearly tells us that we should present the 'invitation' [dawah] to Islam to others with wisdom [hikmat] and words of 'beauty' [hasanah]. What this suggests is that besides the content of the message what is equally

¹Mohamed Talbi, "Unavoidable Dialogue in a Pluralist World: A Personal Account", *Encounters Journal of Inter-cultural Perspectives*, Islamic Foundation, Markfield, Leicestershire, UK, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1995, pp. 60-1.

²See Isma'il Raji al Fārūqī (Ed.), *Triologue of the Abrahamic faiths*, Second Edition, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, Virginia, 1986, p. 11.

important is the style of communicating that message. We believe that the content of our message—as contained in the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith [the traditions of the Prophet]—are perfect, but we have not adopted the proper means and style of presenting that message. There is presently such a communication gap between Muslims and others that they cannot understand each other. Further, much misunderstanding has been created about Islam but Muslims have not been able to dispel these wrong notions. I see that as a crucial element in the dialogue process. What is more, I believe that through dialogue others may see how Islam has an answer to many of the ills plaguing the world today—the collapse of morality, alcoholism, world debt, for instance.¹

Furthermore, Almighty Allah says in the Qur'ān: "...Say: "Allah is witness between me and you; this Qur-ān hath been revealed to me by inspiration. That I may warn you and all whom it reaches...."² In addition to exhortations to warn and invite others, the Qur'ān itself directly addresses the Jews and Christians, calling upon them to embrace the final revelation of Allah, e.g., 3: 64, 70, 98; 4: 47, 171; 5: 15, 77; 29: 47; 62: 6; and many other verses. The Qur'ān presents itself as the final revelation to pronounce judgment over that about which those communities to whom revelations had previously been given have come to disagree. Therefore, Almighty Allah says in the Qur'ān:

They say: "Become Jews or Christians if ye would be guided (to salvation)." Say thou: "Nay! (I would rather) the Religion of Abraham

¹Rafiabadi, Hamid Naseem, op.cit.

²*The Qur'ān*, 6: 19.

the True,¹ and he joined not gods with Allah.” Say ye: “We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismā‘il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them: and we submit to Allah.²

The *dīn*, the monotheistic religion, therefore, was accurately revealed before, the Qur’ān affirms, but those communities who received messages prior to the time of Muhammad (SAAS) became doubtful and disconcerted about it.³ Some deliberately ignored or abandoned the *dīn*; others distorted it. The confirmation and clarification of the historic divine message was the mission of prophet Muhammad (SAAS). Thus the Qur’ān states: “Verily this Qur-ān doth explain to the Children of Israel most of the matters in which they disagree. And it certainly is a Guide and a Mercy to those who believe.”⁴ Therefore, those of understanding from each religious community are invited to accept Islam as the culmination of that which they already believe. Surely, the Qur’ān is not a book of history. But, like parables a reference is made to past events to make a point. Hence, Almighty Allah says in the Qur’ān:

There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it,—a detailed exposition of all things, and a Guide and a Mercy to any such as believe.⁵

¹*Hanīf*: inclined to right opinion, orthodox (in the literal meaning of the Greek words), firm in faith, sound and well-balanced, true. Perhaps the last word, True, sums up most of the other shades.

²*The Qur’ān*, 2: 135-6.

³See Ibid, 42: 13-4.

⁴Ibid, 27: 76-7.

⁵Ibid, 12: 111.

Most of the references are made to show that the pagans of Makkah were not the only people who rejected and persecuted their prophet. Other prophets were also treated in the same manner. When Noah (AS) preached and told his people about Oneness of Allah and he (AS) being His messenger and to fear Allah alone: The Dialogue between him and his people has been recorded by Allah in the Qur'ān as:

Behold, their brother Noah said to them: “Will ye not fear (Allah)? I am to you a trustworthy messenger. So fear Allah, and obey me. No reward do I ask of you for it: my reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds: So fear Allah, and obey me.” They said: “Shall we believe in thee when it is the meanest that follow thee?” He said: “And what do I know as to what they do? Their account is only with my Lord, if ye could (but) understand. I am not one to drive away those who believe. I am sent only as a plain warner”.¹

The response he got was no different from the one which all the messengers of Allah get: “They said: “If thou desist not, O Noah! Thou shalt be stoned (to death).””² Similarly Abraham (AS) entreats his father saying:

Behold, he said to his father: “O my father! Why worship that which heareth not and seeth not, and can profit thee nothing?...O my father! Serve not Satan: for Satan is a rebel against (Allah) Most Gracious. O my father! I fear lest a Chastisement afflict thee from (Allah) Most Gracious, so that thou become to Satan a friend.”³

¹Ibid, 26: 106-15.

²Ibid, 26: 116.

³Ibid, 19: 42, 44-5.

The reply Abraham (AS) got to his request is no different from what the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) got from Abū Lahab bin ‘Abd al-Mutalib and Abū al-Ḥakam ‘Amr bin Hishām (Abū Jahl). Āzar, the father of Abraham, replied, as stated in the Qur’ān: “(The father) replied: “art thou shrinking from my gods, O Abraham? If thou forbear not, I will indeed stone thee: Now get away from me for a good long while!””¹ Furthermore, Abraham (AS) had established a definite reasoning against idolators. Nothing was left for him except to reason against the people who proclaimed themselves gods. When the king, Namrūd, heard of Abraham’s safe exit from the fire he became very angry. He feared that the status of godhead he had proclaimed for himself was now challenged by an ordinary human being. He summoned Abraham (AS) to the palace and held a dialogue with him, which Allah the Almighty recounted:

Hast thou not turned thy thought to one who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because Allah had granted him Power? Abraham said: “My Lord is He Who giveth life and death.” He said: “I give life and death.” Said Abraham: “But it is Allah that causeth the sun to rise from the East: Do thou then cause it to rise from the West.” Thus was he confounded who (in arrogance) rejected faith. Nor doth Allah give guidance to a people unjust.²

The Qur’ān prescribes the same technique of persuasion for all prophets (AS). When Moses and Aaron were sent to Pharaoh, Allah told them: “Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds; But speak to him mildly; perchance he may take warning or fear (Allah).”³ Pharaoh’s reply conforms to the pattern: “Be sure I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will crucify you

¹Ibid, 19: 46.

²Ibid, 2: 258.

³Ibid, 20: 43-4.

all.”¹ Shu‘aib’s (AS) astonishments on his people’s demand to revert/convert to their faith—even if he did not like it—sums up the Qur’ānic teaching on one’s freedom to change one’s faith/belief:

The leaders, the arrogant party among his people, said: “O Shu‘aib! We shall certainly drive thee out of our city—(thee) and those who believe with thee; or else ye (thou and they) shall have to return to our religion.” He said: “What! Even though we do detest (them)?....”²

Furthermore, in the Qur’ān, Almighty Allah has preserved the dialogue between Noah (AS) and his people as:

We sent Noah to his People (with a mission); “I have come to you as a clear warner. That ye serve none but Allah: Verily I do fear for you the punishment of a Grievous Day.” But the Chiefs of the Unbelievers among his People said: “We see (in) thee nothing but a man like ourselves: Nor do we see that any follow thee but the meanst amongst us, apparently nor do we see in you (all) any merit above us: In fact we think ye are liars!” He said: “O my People! See ye if (it be that) I have a Clear Sign from my Lord and that He hath sent Mercy unto me from Him, but that the Mercy hath been obscured from your sight? Shall we compel you to accept it when ye are averse to it? And O my People! I ask you for no wealth in return: my reward is from none but Allah: But I will not drive away (in contempt) those who believe: For verily they are to meet their Lord, and ye I see are the ignorant ones! And O my People! Who

¹Ibid, 7: 124.

²Ibid, 7: 88.

would help me against Allah if I drove them away? Will ye not then take heed? I tell you not that with me are the Treasures of Allah, nor do I know what is hidden, nor claim I to be an angel. Nor yet do I say, of those whom your eyes do despise that Allah will not grant them (all) that is good: Allah knoweth best what is in their souls: I should, if I did, indeed be a wrong-doer." They said: "O Noah! Thou hast disputed with us, and (much) hast thou prolonged the dispute with us: now bring upon us what thou threatenest us with, if thou speakest the truth!?" He said: "Truly, Allah will bring it on you if He wills,—and then, ye will not be able to frustrate it! Of no profit will be my counsel to you, much as I desire to give you (good) counsel, if it be that Allah willeth to leave you astray: He is your Lord! And to Him will ye return!" Or do they say, "he has forged it"? Say: "if I had forged it, on me were my sin! And I am free of the sins of which ye are guilty!"¹

Narrating the dialogue between Hūd (AS) and his people, Almighty Allah says:

To the ‘Ād People (We sent) Hūd, one of their own brethren. He said: "O my people! Worship Allah! Ye have no other god but Him. You are only forgers. O my people! I ask of you no reward for this (Message). My reward is from none but Him who created me: Will ye not then understand? And O my people! Ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him (in repentance): He will send you the skies pouring abundant rain, and add strength to your strength: So turn

¹Ibid, 11: 25-35.

ye not back in sin!” They said: “O Hūd! No Clear (Sign) hast thou brought us, and we are not the ones to desert our gods on thy word! Nor shall we believe in thee! We say nothing but that (perhaps) some of our gods may have seized thee with evil.” He said: “I call Allah to witness, and do ye bear witness, that I am free from the sin of ascribing, to Him, other gods as partners! So scheme (your worst) against me, all of you, and give me no respite. I put my trust in Allah, my Lord and your Lord! There is not a moving creature, but He hath grasp of its forelock. Verily, it is my Lord that is on a straight Path. If ye turn away,—I (at least) have conveyed the Message with which I was sent to you. My Lord will make another People to succeed you, and you will not harm Him in the least. For my Lord hath care and watch over all things.”¹

The dialogue between Şāliḥ (AS) and his people is mentioned in the Qur’ān as:

To the Thamūd People (We sent) Şāliḥ, one of their own brethren. He said: “O my People! Worship Allah: ye have no other God but Him. It is He Who hath produced you from the earth and settled you therein: then ask forgiveness of Him, and turn to Him (in repentance): for my Lord is (always) near, ready to answer.” They said: “O Şāliḥ! Thou hast been of us!—a centre of our hopes hitherto! Dost thou (now) forbid us the worship of what our fathers worshipped? But we are really in suspicious (disquieting) doubt as to that to which thou invitest us.” He said: “O my people! Do ye see?—If I have a

¹Ibid, 11: 50-7.

Clear (Sign) from my Lord and He hath sent Mercy unto me from Himself,—who then can help me against Allah if I were to disobey Him? What then would ye add to my (portion) but perdition?”¹

Similarly dialogue between Shu‘aib (AS) and his people is mentioned in the Qur’ān as:

To the Madyan people (We sent) Shu‘aib, one of their own brethren: he said: “O my people! Worship Allah: ye have no other god but Him. And give not short measure or weight: I see you in prosperity, but I fear for you the Chastisement of a Day that will compass (you) all round. And O my people! Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due: Commit not evil in the land with intent to do mischief. That which is left you by Allah is best for you, if ye (but) believed! But I am not set over you to keep watch!” They said: “O Shu‘aib! Does thy prayer command thee that we leave off the worship which our fathers practiced, or that we leave off doing what we like with our property? Truly, thou art the one that forbeareth with faults and is right-minded!” He said: “O my people! See ye whether I have a Clear (Sign) from my Lord, and He hath given me sustenance (pure and) good as from Himself? I wish not, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you to do. I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my power; and my success (in my task) can only come from Allah. In Him I trust, and unto Him I turn. And O my people! Let not my dissent

¹Ibid, 11: 61-3.

(from you) cause you to sin, lest ye suffer a fate similar to that of the people of Noah or of Hūd or of Ṣāliḥ, nor are the people of Lūṭ far off from you! But ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn unto Him (in repentance): for my Lord is indeed full of mercy and loving-kindness.” They said: “O Shu‘aib! Much of what thou sayest we do not understand! In fact among us we see that thou hast no strength! Were it not for thy family, we should certainly have stoned thee! For thou hast among us no great position!” He said: “O my people! Is then my family of more consideration with you than Allah? For ye cast Him away behind your backs (with contempt). But verily my Lord encompasseth all that ye do!”¹

Similarly dialogue, between Moses (AS) and Pharaoh, between Moses (AS) and his people, between Moses (AS) and his brother Aaron, between Moses (AS) and Sāmirī, has been recorded by Almighty Allah in chapter 20th of the Qur’ān. On the same way/pattern/method, Almighty Allah has recorded the dialogue between Abraham (AS) and his father, between Abraham (AS) and his people, between Abraham (AS) and his son, in the 37th chapter of the Qur’ān. Furthermore, in the same chapter i.e. 37th, Almighty Allah reveals the dialogue between polytheists/wrong-doers which will be held on Doomsday. Moreover the Qur’ān has preserved, the dialogue of Almighty Allah with angel’s (The Qur’ān, 2: 30-1), the dialogue of Almighty Allah with Satan (The Qur’ān, 7: 12; 15: 31-2, 34-9), the dialogue of Almighty Allah with *Banī Isrā’īl* (The Qur’ān, 2: 13-6, 40), the dialogue of Ibrāhīm (AS) with Almighty Allah (The Qur’ān, 2: 260), the dialogue of Almighty Allah with ‘Isā (AS) (The Qur’ān, 5: 116), the dialogue of prophet Muhammad (SAAS) with his *qaum/nation/ummah* (The Qur’ān, 2:189,

¹Ibid, 11: 84-92.

219, 217; 5: 4; 79: 42; 2: 222; 18: 83; 4: 176), the dialogue of Noah (AS) with his *qaum/nation/ummah* (The Qur'ān, 26: 106-16; 11: 27-8), the dialogue of Noah (AS) with Almighty Allah (The Qur'ān, 71: 5-24), the dialogue of Ibrāhīm (AS) with his *qaum/nation/ummah* (The Qur'ān, 6: 74-80, 83), the dialogue of Ibrāhīm (AS) with his father and his *qaum/nation/ummah* (The Qur'ān, 21: 52-72), the dialogue of Ibrāhīm (AS) with Namrūd (The Qur'ān, 2: 258), the dialogue of Ibrāhīm (AS) with his son Ismā'īl (AS) (The Qur'ān, 37: 102), the dialogue of Mūsā (AS) with Khazir (The Qur'ān, 18: 65-70), the dialogue of Zakariya (AS) with Almighty Allah (The Qur'ān, 3: 38; 19: 4-6; 21: 89; 19: 7-15), the dialogue of Maryam (AS) with Jibrā'il (The Qur'ān, 19: 16-21), the dialogue of Maryam (AS) with his *qaum/nation* (The Qur'ān, 19: 27-33), the dialogue of Ibrāhīm (AS) with his father (The Qur'ān, 19: 42-7), the dialogue of Mūsā (AS) with Almighty Allah (The Qur'ān, 20: 9-10, 18-21, 29-36), the dialogue of Mūsā (AS) with Fir'aun (The Qur'ān, 20: 43, 47-52, 56-7, 68-9, 70-3), the dialogue of Mūsā (AS) and his *qaum/nation/ummah* with Qārūn (The Qur'ān, 28: 76-82), the dialogue of Mūsā (AS) with Hārūn (The Qur'ān, 7: 148; 20: 88; 7: 150; 20: 86-8, 90-7), the dialogue of Mūsā (AS) with his *qaum/nation/ummah* (The Qur'ān, 2: 67-73), the dialogue of Noah (AS) with his *qaum/nation/ummah* (The Qur'ān, 11: 25-34), the dialogue of Sulaimān (The Qur'ān, 27: 15-44). Recording so much of references from the Qur'ān it is evident that the Qur'ān is filled with the incidents related with dialogue.

All the Messengers and prophets of Allah *Subhānahū wa Ta'ālā* invited people to worship only Him (Allah) alone and not to associate anything in His partnership. Nevertheless, the messengers and prophets of Allah *Subhānahū wa Ta'ālā* were only to warn the people, they were not to be guards over them. "...But thou art there only to warn...."¹ The pluralistic community, which prophet Muhammad (SAAS) sought to

¹Ibid, 11: 12.

establish presupposes religious liberty. Toleration is not enough; liberty to practice and preach a dissenting religion, to retain cultural and ethnic identity and to follow and administer personal law must be based on the idea of rights and guaranteed by the dominant group. In Madīnah it was not a concession but a right established by the Qur’ān. *Sūrah al-Muddaththir*, revealed at Makkah, opens with a firm command to prophet Muhammad (SAAS) to stand upright, proclaim the truth and warn those who would not accept it. It ends on the note that the Qur’ān is but a reminder. He who accepts it does it for his own betterment and he who will reject it would do so to his own detriment: “Nay, this surely is an admonition: Let any who will, keep it in remembrance!”¹ *Sūrah al-Muzzammil*, revealed at Makkah, also deals with the divine mission of prophet Muhammad (SAAS): “Verily this is an Admonition: Therefore, whoso will, let him take a (straight) path to his Lord!”² *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn*, however, is the most forthright statement of policy, revealed at Makkah, ninth in the order of revelation. It says that as there is absolutely no meeting-ground between the life of non-believers and believers, between polytheists of Makkah and prophet of Allah, Muhammad (SAAS) and as they are in complete disagreement not only with regard to the basic concepts of religion but also with regard to its details and other aspects, there can possibly be no compromise between prophet of Allah and polytheists of Makkah. Therefore Almighty Allah commands prophet Muhammad (SAAS) to say or reply the polytheists, as is mentioned in the Qur’ān: “...To you be your Way, and to me mine.”³ Another Makkan *sūrah* is related with the doctrine of the resurrection and a future life. The *sūrah* concludes by saying that there is a life beyond the grave and on the final day:

The Day when the Earth will be rent asunder,
letting them hurrying out: that will be a

¹Ibid, 74: 54-5.

²Ibid, 73: 19.

³Ibid, 109: 6.

gathering together,—quite easy for Us. We know best what they say; and thou art not one to compel them by force. So admonish with the Qur-ān such as fear My Warning!¹

Sūrah al-Nahl is the first *sūrah* which lays down the rules of propagating the message of Allah:

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: For thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.²

Again the Makkan *sūrah*, *al-Zumar*, point out that man himself is responsible for his good or bad destiny and the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) is not custodian over them. His (SAAS) duty is to teach and warn but he (SAAS) cannot force men's wills:

Verily We have revealed the Book to thee in Truth, for (instructing) mankind. He, then, that receives guidance benefits his own soul: But he that strays injures his own soul. Nor art thou set a Custodian over them.³

Al-'Ankabūt, a Makkan *sūrah*, elaborates the technique of persuasion given in *al-Nahl*:

And dispute/argue ye not with the People of the Book, except in best way, unless it be with those of them who do wrong but say, “We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and

¹Ibid, 50: 44-5.

²Ibid, 16: 125.

³Ibid, 39: 41.

your God is One; and it is to Him we submit (in Islam).”¹

Again, in *sūrah Yūnus*, prophet Muhammad (SAAS) has been told that his duty is confined to the delivery of the message entrusted to Him:

Say: “O ye men! Now Truth hath reached you from your Lord! Those, who receive Guidance, do so for the good of their own souls; those who stray, do so to their own loss: And I am not (set) over you to arrange your affairs.”²

In *sūrah al-An ‘ām* the same message and theme is repeated: “If it had been Allah’s Will, they would not have taken false gods: but We made thee not one to watch over their doings, nor art thou set over them to dispose of their affairs.”³ In the period in which prophet Muhammad (SAAS) was in Makkah, the Qur’ān makes many clear declarations that it is entirely up to the unbelievers whether to accept the prophet Muhammad’s (SAAS) message or not. Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) has not been appointed to compel the unbelievers in any way and that he is not a warder or keeper or custodian or guardian over the people. The first *Madīnan sūrah* in which the same subject has been discussed is *al-Baqarah*:

There is no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects Tagut and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.⁴

¹Ibid, 29: 46.

²Ibid, 10: 108.

³Ibid, 6: 107.

⁴Ibid, 2: 256.

This principle of no compulsion is reiterated in the *Madīnān sūrah*, *Āl-ī ‘Imrān*. It assumes a greater importance, because the verse was revealed after the victory of Badr.

So if they dispute with thee, say: “I have submitted my whole self to Allah and so have those who follow me.” And say to the People of the Book and to those who are unlearned: “Do ye (also) submit yourselves?” If they do, they are in right guidance, but if they turn back, thy duty is to convey the Message; and in Allah’s sight are (all) His servants.¹

Sūrah al-Mā’idah is the last *sūrah* of the Qur’ān in order of revelation. It has the same message as: “And obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and be on your guard. But if you turn away, then know that on Our Messenger lies only the clear conveyance of the Message.”² And: “The Messenger’s duty is but to proclaim (the Message). But Allah knoweth all that ye reveal and ye conceal.”³ This is freedom of faith/belief in Islamic tradition. After all it is a personal matter and it is Allah alone who knows what one reveals and what one hides or conceal. A scholar, pointing towards this freedom, says:

God has sent His Guidance to the whole of mankind. But God respects His creature’s freedom, for freedom is the foundation and base of man’s special dignity. It would have been very easy for God to overpower His creatures. He willingly refrained from acting in this way: ‘If it had been thy Lord’s Will, they would all have believed—all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe?’ (Qur’ān X: 99). So diversity and

¹Ibid, 3: 20.

²Ibid, 5: 92.

³Ibid, 5: 99.

pluralism are part of our human condition and dignity, and they are the unavoidable result of our true liberty. It is up to us to make the best of our liberty...and of our differences: ‘To each is a goal to which he turns. Then race together towards all that is good! Wheresoever ye are, God will bring you, all of you. For God hath power over all things’ (Qur’ān II: 148). ‘If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people. But He wanted to test you in what He hath given to you. So strive as in a race in all virtues. You will, all of you, return to God. Then will He inform you of that wherein you differed’ (Qur’ān V: 51). Our human duty is to be sincere and righteous, and, in the last resort, it is up to the Merciful to judge, ‘He Who hath inscribed for Himself the rule of Mercy’ (Qur’ān VI: 12).¹

The Makkan’s persecuted prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and his followers and imposed a social and economic boycott upon them. They forced them to live in seclusion. But later, when a severe famine afflicted Makkah and many were dying of hunger, Abu Sufyan, a staunch enemy, at that time, of the prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and Islam, approached him (SAAS) and said that, O Muhammad pray for the Makkans, they are dying. So Muhammad (SAAS) prayed and heavy rain came with the mercy of Allah and the famine was ended.² Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) from the very beginning of his mission of Islam spared no effort to restore peaceful coexistence with those who had previously been enemies, and to show respect for people of different faiths and beliefs. He

¹*Encounters Journal of Inter-cultural Perspectives*, op.cit.

²*Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Hadīth No. 1020.

(SAAS) promoted freedom of thought and free expression.¹ On another occasion, during this period of persecution, prophet Muhammad (SAAS) took a trip to Tā'if, a prosperous town near Makkah, and invited them to Islam. But contrary to his hopes and expectations, he met with great hostility. The people of Tā'if hooted him, pelted him with stones, and pursued him for two or three miles. Bloody from wounds to his head, prophet Muhammad (SAAS) became very weak. He prayed to Allah, telling Him what had happened and begged His mercy upon him. In response, Almighty Allah sent angel Gabra'īl along with the angel of the mountains. They asked the prophet's (SAAS) permission to destroy the town of Tā'if and the city of Makkah. Muhammad (SAAS) pleaded with them not to do such a thing. He said that I would rather have someone from their loins who will worship Allah, the Almighty, alone, who has no associate or partner.² In response to the persecution of the Muslims at Makkah, prophet Muhammad (SAAS) permitted them to migrate towards Abyssinia, hoping that the king Negus would protect them. Makkans also sent a delegation to king Negus bearing precious gifts and they pleaded with the king to send the Muslims back to Makkah as, according to Makkans, they not only insult the Makkans and their ancestral beliefs but they also insult the Christian beliefs as well. Thus there was a dialogue between king Negus and Muslims, between king Negus and Makkan delegation:

King Negus called them [Muslims] to his palace and asked them to explain themselves. Jafar ibn Abu Talib stood up to testify to his new faith. When the king asked him to recite from the Qur'ān, he recited from chapter (Sura) Maryam.

¹About the prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) attributes and manners see Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*, Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, USA, 1996, pp. 492-503.

²Ibid, p. 138.

King Nigus, listening to the recitation, wept so profusely that his beard became wet with tears.

Recovering himself, the king told the Makkan delegation that this revelation and the revelation of Jesus were from the same source. He told them that he could not hand over these persons to them, and he returned their gifts. Makkans said to the king as their last resort that these Muslims considered Jesus to be only a servant of God, not his Son, and they also rejected the Trinity. The king asked the Muslims about their belief. Jafar recited the verses from Sura Maryam (Mary) that say: ‘He (Jesus) is God’s servant and Messenger; a spirit and a word from God that He bestowed on the Virgin Mary,’ Al-Qur'an 19: 16-36. Hearing this, the king said: ‘Even so do we believe! Blessed be you and blessed be your Master’. The [sic] asked the delegation to leave and told the Muslims to live in Abyssinia with security as long as they would like to live.¹

There is a good evidence of the realization of these principles, particularly, in the early history of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) himself in his call towards the truth of Islam in Makkah evinced peace and perseverance. Appeal was made to both the intuitive and the rational faculties of the people. The paganism and tribalism was rooted in them more superstitiously rather than having any rational basis and so the Qur'ānic addresses in precise and eloquent manner could serve appealing to their inner self. Recognizing the uniqueness (*Tawhīd*) of Allah and generating the love for morality (*sālihāt*) was at core of prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) call and

¹Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, USA, 2007, p. 72.

to each one what would matter was his own faith (*dīn*) and deeds. In Madīnah Muslims had the encounter with the people of the Book (*ahl al-Kitāb*) and other pagan tribes of Awas and Khazraj. Before prophet Muhammad (SAAS) migrated to Madīnah, there had been intense hostility among these groups against one another. Christians were against Jews and Awas and Khazraj had their own enmity against each other. Prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) call and forwarding the hand of friendship brought a positive change in the whole socio-political fabric of Madīnah. Not only Christian-Jewish wars cooled down but the age old feuds between Awas and Khazraj also ended and alliance for peace became their common goal.¹ The prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) pact with the Jews and the Christians of Madīnah serves as the constitution of Madīnah state and is rightly called the first written constitution of the world. When did the Christians signed the pact has been reported by Syed Barakat Ahmad as:

There were no Christians in Medina, so they did not join the umma. But in 9/630 when a deputation of Christians under the leadership of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ ‘Āqib, al-Aiham and Bishop Abū Hāritha b. ‘Alqama visited Medina the Apostle invited the Christians to join him on the basis of the Unity of God. He said:

O People of the Book! Come to a word equal between us and you that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partner with him, and that some of us take not others for Lords beside Allāh [The Qur’ān, 3: 64].

It is significant that this invitation was extended to them after they had declined the Apostle's offer to accept Islam. The Qur’ānic invitation

¹Haykal, Muhammad Husyn, *The Life of Muhammad*, New Crescent Publishing Co., Delhi, 2007, pp. 195-7.

'to come to a word equal between us and you' does not, therefore, provide a basis for a compromise on matters of faith.¹

While recognizing all the position of these communities an alliance had been formed to grant them rights of religious freedom, protection of life and property and at the same time duties were pronounced to ensure the total peace and harmony in the state. This gave both the Jews and the Christians the status of federation (*ummah*) and along with the Muslims all constitute a universal *ummah* under the leadership of the prophet Muhammad (SAAS):

The people of this covenant shall come to the assistance of one another against who ever attacks Yathrib [Madinah]. If they are called to cease hostilities and to enter into a peace, they shall be bound to do so in the interest of peace. If, on the other hand, they call upon the Muslims to cease hostilities and to enter into a peace, the Muslims shall be bound to do so and maintain the peace except when the war is against their religion. To every smaller group belongs the share which is their due as members of the larger group which is party to this covenant. The Jews of al-Aws, as well as their clients, are entitled to the same rights as this covenant has granted to its parties together with the goodness and charity of the latter. Charity and goodness are clearly distinguishable from crime and injury, and there is no responsibility except for ones own deeds. God is the guarantor of the truth and good will be of this covenant. This covenant shall constitute no protection for the unjust or the criminal. Whoever goes out to

¹Ahmad, Syed Barakat, *Non-Muslims and the Umma*, Khuda Bakhsh Extension Lecture, n.d., pp. 8-9. See also Ibn Hishām, pp. 401-411.

fight as well as whoever stays at home shall be safe and secure in this city unless he has perpetrated an injustice or committed a crime. God grants His protection to whoever acts in piety, charity and goodness.¹

Well aware that the situation of the Muslims at Madīnah, both of the *Muhājirūn* and the *Anṣār*, was dangerously unsecured, prophet Muhammad (SAAS) first established brotherhood among them all. Then, meeting with leaders of the various Jewish and polytheist tribes, he persuaded them to sign this pact or treaty of mutual support and defense. ‘Abd al-Rahīm Azzam, the first Secretary General of Arab League, wrote as follows about this Pact of Madīnah:

The pact mounted to an agreement for peaceful coexistence, a defensive alliance for cooperation against aggression that sought to protect a group of small states, each enjoying under the provisions of the pact control over its own people and freedom to preach its own religion. The signatories guaranteed to aid one another and to protect each other's beliefs against anyone who wished to bring harm upon their lands and peoples. Thus, they guaranteed freedom of beliefs as well as freedom of preaching to members of the Pact, despite the diversity of their beliefs.²

Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) showed exemplary good treatment towards Christians also. An important Christian delegation of Najran situated between Makkah and Yemen met and conversed with the prophet Muhammad (SAAS). Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) accommodated them in the *Masjid* and they had a dialogue with him (SAAS) on religious issues. A

¹Haykal, Muhammad Husyn, op.cit., pp. 182-3.

²‘Abd al-Rahmān Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad*, n.d., p.128.

historic and important treaty was concluded between Muslims and Christians in which many rights were agreed upon for Christians.¹ Following has been said about this delegation and its dialogue with prophet Muhammad (SAAS):

The people of Najran, a town lying south of Makkah on the way to Yemen, were mostly Christians. One day a delegation of sixty of Najran's political and religious leaders came to Madina to meet with Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). The Prophet (SAWS) and his companions welcomed them and let them stay in the Prophet's Masjid (Masjid al Nabawi). They were treated as special guests and, according to some accounts, were allowed to conduct their worship at the Masjid. They spoke with the prophet (SAWS) about Jesus as Son of God. The prophet (SAWS) in return recited the verses in Ch. 3: 36-64. The friendly dialogue continued for a second day in a friendly atmosphere as both parties presented their arguments.

Since both parties stuck to their original positions, they decided to ask God to send a curse, called Mubahila in the Qur'an, on the wrong side. This was a common practice between religious groups or figures in that period; if two parties could not agree on a matter, they would call upon God to decide between them. So on the present occasion the two parties decided that the leaders of both would come forth with their families the next morning and would evoke a curse upon the party in the wrong. The prophet came out along

¹See Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, op.cit., pp. 450-1.

with his daughter Fatimah, his son in law, Ali, and his two grandsons, Hassan and Hussain. The Najran delegation did not come forth. They decided to withdraw from the curse, signing a treaty of peace with the Prophet (SAWS) instead. A pillar in the Prophet Mosque where the groups gathered and the discussion took place has been known ever since as Ustana alWafud (a pillar in the name of delegation). While many such memorials have been erased from the Mosque, this sign still remains.¹

In 5 A. H., after the battle of Ditch (*Khandaq*), political life in Madīnah finally became stable. Many Arab tribes made treaties of mutual support and cooperation with the Muslims in response to the constant threats from Makkah. Then in the 6 A. H., prophet Muhammad (SAAS) had a dream of performing '*Umrah* at *Ka'bah* (the House of Allah) at Makkah. He (SAAS) announced his intention and asked people to join him. He told them that since there would be no fighting, everyone should keep his sword covered in its scabbard. When they reached a place near Makkah called Hudaibiyah, there the Muslims were not allowed to enter into the city of Makkah. Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) exhorted his people to use diplomacy to resolve the issue peacefully. From Makkan side Budail bin Warqa' Al-Khuza'i came with some people and had a dialogue with prophet Muhammad (SAAS). After him Makkans also sent Mikraz bin Hafs. He also had a dialogue with prophet Muhammad (SAAS). He was followed by Al-Hulais bin 'Alqamah. Hulais was succeeded by 'Urwah bin Mas'ud Ath-Thaqafi. They all had a peaceful dialogues with prophet Muhammad (SAAS). Time passed and negotiations went on but with no results. Then prophet Muhammad (SAAS) sent 'Uthmān (RA) towards the Makkans. 'Uthmān (RA) went to Abu Sufyan and other chiefs of Makkah and told them that

¹*Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, op.cit., pp. 74-5.

the Muslims had come only to perform the '*Umrah*' and that they had no intention to fight. He assured them that after the performance of ceremonies they would soon depart peacefully. But the Makkans were inflexible and did not prepare to grant them the permission. After some further interchange of messages and dialogues, both, Makkans and Muslims agreed to conclude a treaty.¹ The following were the clauses of the said treaty:

1. The Muslims shall return this time and come back next year, but they shall not stay in Makkah for more than three days. They shall not come back armed but can bring with them swords only sheathed in scabbards and these shall be kept in bags.
2. War activities shall be suspended for ten years, during which both parties will live in full security and neither will raise sword against the other.
3. Whosoever wishes to join Muhammad, or enter into treaty with him, should have the liberty to do so; and likewise whosoever wishes to join Quraish, or enter into treaty with them, should be allowed to do so.
4. If anyone from Quraish goes over to Muhammad without his guardian's permission, meaning a fugitive, he should be sent back to the Quraish; but should any of Muhammad's followers return to the Quraish, he shall not be sent back.²

This treaty is proof of Islam and of Muslims' desire for peaceful coexistence with people irrespective of their religion or social standing. This treaty was signed between the people

¹For more details see Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, op.cit., 2002 (Revised Edition), pp. 398-410.

²Ibid, pp. 403-4.

of Quraish, represented by Suhail bin ‘Amr, and the Muslims, represented by prophet Muhammad (SAAS) himself. There arose some disputes before signing the treaty but prophet Muhammad (SAAS) solved them all for peace to prevail:

‘Ali bin Abi Talib, who acted as a scribe, began with the words: *Bismillâh ir-Rahman ir-Raheem*, i.e., “In the Name of Allâh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,” but the Makkan Suhail bin ‘Amr declared that he knew nothing about Ar-Rahman and insisted upon the customary formula *Bi-ismika Allâhumma*, i.e., “In Your Name, O Allâh!” The Muslims grumbled with uneasiness but the Prophet agreed. He then went on to dictate: “This is what Muhammad, the Messenger of Allâh, has agreed to with Suhail bin ‘Amr.” Upon this Suhail again protested: “Had we acknowledged you as Allâh’s Messenger, we would not have prevented you from the Sacred House, nor fought against you. Write your own name and the name of your father.” The Muslims grumbled as before and refused to consent to the change. The Prophet, however, in the larger interest of Islam, erased the words himself, and dictated instead: “Muhammad, the son of ‘Abdullah.”¹

This treaty shows that prophet Muhammad (SAAS) preferred peace even at the cost of annoying some of his close companions. He knew that peaceful living would provide an opportunity to Muslims to dialogue with others, to move freely, and to build relations. This treaty is an excellent example of going the extra mile with others to achieve peace. Furthermore Canon Brian Cox, talking about the society at Madînah, says:

¹Ibid, p. 404.

In 622 CE, the community that had formed around Muhammad, and his teaching migrated to Yathrib (Medina), and there they sought to create a new society based on the religion of Abraham and on the transcendent values that the nascent Muslim community shared with the peoples of the book (Jews and Christians). Rising above Arab tribalism, Muhammad created an intentionally pluralistic and inclusive community grounded in social justice and forgiveness that sought to resolve conflict by peaceful means. He sought to heal the wounds of the past by forging a new Arab identity based on submission to God. Among contemporary Muslims, the Yathrib community of Muhammad's time serves as the paradigm or model for faith-based societies.¹

Another scholar, Syed Barakat Ahmad, pointing towards the same society of Madīnah, says:

Analyses of the pattern of dominance in the pluralistic umma which the Apostle sought to create, demand perspectives which are not only rooted in specific Arab cultural contexts, but perhaps more importantly, recognize the Apostle's persecution in Mecca and his fervent desire to see the establishment of a society in which religious controversy, though encouraged—and at times even heated—should neither deteriorate into mutual exchange of insults nor should it be stifled.²

¹Cox, Canon Brian, *Faith-Based Reconciliation A Moral Vision That Transforms People and Societies*, Xlibris Corporation, America, 2007, p.18.

²*Non-Muslims and the umma*, op.cit., p. 39.

At an another place Syed Barakat Ahmad, pointing towards the same community or society at Madīnah, says:

The Jews or Christians were not expected to change their religion. Their belief in the Unity of God was sufficient basis for cooperation, but not integration. It was the concept of the plural society as an ideal type. It was a plural society allowing entry on the basis of elective affinities in which racial or ethnic differences had no relevance.

The Qur'ānic conception of umma in general is based on the belief that “all mankind were a single umma and Allah sent unto it prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners [The Qur'ān, 2: 213].” Race and colour play no part in this umma: “O mankind, lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you peoples and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allāh, is the best in conduct [The Qur'ān, 49: 13].” The Apostle laid the foundation of a plural community or society at Yathrib and called it the Umma.¹

Dialogue must take place in a respectful atmosphere. The Qur'ān is very concerned that people speak civilly to each other on all occasions, especially during moments of tension or disagreement. Moreover, it is said about prophet Muhammad (SAAS):

He was neither a Sabbāb (one who would abuse others), nor a Fāhish (one who speaks bad

¹Ibid, p. 10.

words), nor one who would curse others, and if he wanted to admonish someone of us, he used to say: “What is wrong with him? Let his forehead be dusted”.¹

The word *Turāb* has been used there. When a Muslim prostrates on ground his/her forehead picks up some dust. Perhaps when prophet Muhammad (SAAS) would be displeased with some one would say these words which could mean also may you submit to Almighty Allah.

Islam is both a natural and rational religion. Its principles and precepts are from the Creator and the Sustainer of man and are truly appropriate to his nature. Similarly, it appeals to ones reason and manifests in his deeds. Dialogue, therefore, finds a good use in the understanding and dealing with the people of other faiths and civilizations and, at the same time, forms its universal ethic of diversities and pluralities. The Qur’ān and the Sunnah enjoin clearly such a use of dialogue. Some of its principles and the terms which encourage it can be elaborated as following:

Kindness: In the speech and discourses one has to be kind and generous. Whatever one has to communicate or transmit to others it ought to be with humbleness and fairness. There is no place for arrogance and pride. As the Qur’ānic verse directs: “...And ye shall speak unto all in a kindly way....”²

Speak Gently: At all times, Muslims must show the best of manners and wisdom when speaking of faith to others. One must listen carefully, and share opinions with careful thought and patience.

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom
and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in

¹*Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Ḥadīth No. 6031.

²*The Qur’ān*, 2: 83.

ways that are best and most gracious: For thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.¹

It may be noted that the word used is ‘Invite’ and not ‘convert’ or ‘baptize’.

And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except in the best way, unless it be with those of them who do wrong. But say, “We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we submit (in Islam).”²

Al-Ihsān: *Al-Ihsān* is from the root word *Hasn* meaning to do better, to beautify; to look one’s best. Its opposite is the word *Qubh* (to look unkempt, to behave badly or disrespectfully). The Qur’ān asks Muslims who engage in interfaith dialogue with other faiths that speak and act in a civilized, seemly way, even if their interlocutors do not adopt such speech and behavior themselves. The Qur’ān says: “Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel evil with what is better (Ahsan). Then will be between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate.”³ *Ihsān* repairs damage and removes sickness from people’s hearts. All prophets (AS) were *Muhsineen* (doers of goodness). *Ihsān* is a prophetic way, since those who practice it win the hearts of people.

Al-Hikmah wa al-Mau’izat al-Hasanah: *Hikmah* or wisdom forms another basis of dialogue. By wisdom one can visualize the things in a broader manner. What is the place and dignity of the other person or persons is recognized by wisdom. Whenever a Muslim enters in a dialogue or has to invite others

¹Ibid, 16: 125.

²Ibid, 29: 46.

³Ibid, 41: 34.

towards the truth of Islam he has to perform it wisely and strategically and without challenging the respect and integrity of others: “Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom....”¹ The dialogue with other needs to be a goodly council, goodly exhortation and beautiful preaching or *mau’izat al-hasnah*:

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: For thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.²

This emphasizes that a Muslim must be sincere in his invitation and discourses about the religion. Such honesty alone can appeal others towards him and lead towards the mutual understanding and common goal. This is the principle of feeling for others fairly and bridging the gap of strangeness and aloofness among the people. The aforementioned verse is from *Sūrah al-Nahl* (the Bee). During the worst persecution of the Muslims by the hands of Makkans’, it was revealed in the last years of prophet Muhammad’s (SAAS) life at Makkah. In contrast to the Bedouin way of requiting persecution with persecution and harshness with harshness, the Qur’ān advises Muslims to requite the Makkans’ persecution with the honey of the honeybee of the Qur’ān, by exercising wisdom, and by giving good advice.

Rationality: Dialogue is to be carried out with reason and that too in a best way. It implies that discourse should be based on arguments and reason. Dry polemics is not encouraged in its opinions and views are to be presented with reason to the best possible way. It serves two fold purposes. One is that ideas and opinions when have rational basis, will sound well and consistent. Secondly, presenting them in the best way will

¹Ibid, 16: 125.

²Ibid.

make them more appealing and convincing. Of course, this is the character of Islam itself that the reason of man is constantly appealed: "...And reason (argue) with them in ways that are best...."¹ This attribute is emphasized in a different way in the following verse of the Qur'ān:

Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of Night and Day,— there are indeed Signs for men of understanding,—Men who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying down or their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (with the saying): "Our Lord not for naught hast Thou created (all) this! Glory to Thee! Give us salvation from the Chastisement of the Fire."²

Mujādalah: This Qur'ānic term describes an early historical period in interfaith relations when followers of different religions competed in attempting to convert each other to their respective religious teachings. Special interfaith circles dedicated initially to logical debate escalated into sites of hostile argumentation in which two or more sides competed to prove which was more capable of answering theological questions. This form of interfaith relations has been referred to as *mujādalah*. The use of the word applies to the concept of convincing others to abandon their own religious truth and accept their opponents' instead. *Mujādalah* was practiced before Muhammad (SAAS) got prophethood between Christians and Jews and others too were involved in it. The Qur'ān reformed the concept by asking Muslims to exercise *Adab*, respect and tolerance in the exercise of *Mujādalah*: "And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except in the best way...."³

¹Ibid.

²Ibid, 3: 190-1.

³Ibid, 29: 46.

Unity on Commonalities: It is also important that where there are meeting-points or commonalities among the people they need to be promoted and augmented. This is in the best interests of humanity. The Qur'ān explicitly directs that the people of the earlier revelations (*ahl al-kitāb*) be told to come and join what is commonly held by the Muslims and them. Meet one another on the common ‘terms’, ‘word’ (*kalimah*), the tenant of belief and worship:

Say: “O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than Allah.” If then they turn back, say ye: “Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah’s Will).”¹

In this way sharing revelation from the same source (Allah) and the doctrine of *Tawhīd* (Unity of Allah) are to be promoted through dialogue. The people as such will come closer to one another and forge socio-cultural unity and stability.

Ta‘āwun: It is the Qur'ānic mandate to work together for the good of Allah's creation. It is meant to apply to people who might otherwise be seen as enemies of the Muslim community, as the Makkans were seen in prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) time. For if sincerely implemented, the wellbeing of all people is assured. *Ta‘āwun* is the principle underlying the current modern understandings of dialogue and conflict resolution. People get together in interfaith dialogue to understand one another and work together for the betterment of the community. The Qur'ān says: “...Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and

¹Ibid, 3: 64.

rancor: Fear Allah: for Allah is strict in punishment.”¹ The converse of the mandate of *Ta’āwun*, that people should support each other in building up the human community, is that they should ‘not’ support each other in tearing it down such behavior is prohibited in Islam. Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said:

Help your brother both when he is persecuting and when he is persecuted. His companions (RA), puzzled by this statement, asked him what do you mean by saying we should help him when he is committing injustice? Prophet Muhammad answered them by saying that they should help him in such a situation by preventing him from doing so.²

Istabiqul Khairāt (to excel or compete in good deeds): This refers to outperforming people of other faiths in doing good works. Addressing the issue of religious diversity Allah asks Muslims:

To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.³

¹Ibid, 5: 2.

²*Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Hadīth No. 2444.

³*The Qur’ān*, 5: 48.

Interfaith Dialogue embodies *Istabiqul Khairāt*, with the additional mandate that Muslims should outshine those of other faiths in doing well for people. This teaching says that if people of other faiths extended their hands in cooperation, in peace building, or in constructive good of any kind for the community at large, Muslims should extend their hands even farther. They should stand at the front line and be the leaders.

Tolerance: Tolerance and perseverance are also substantive traits of dialogue in Islam. Primarily the position of the other people is to be recognized and a due respect be given to them. Agreement or concord is not always possible and differences and dissension also takes place in a dialogue. So one need not be perturbed or coercive in the process of dialogue although there are dissensions among the parties. He has to be tolerant in taking the other's views and opinions and impress upon the latter for giving the second thought over the issues. Moreover, the Qur'ān does not make it a binding upon a Muslim to convert the others definitely to the Islamic faith. What it promulgates is to demonstrate the truth (*al-haq*) properly to all people. That is why coercion is forbidden in Islam and perseverance and tolerance are encouraged at the various levels and stages of dialogue.

Ta‘ārafū: It means knowing, understanding and building relations. It comes from the root word ‘*arafa*. Almighty Allah says in the Qur’ān:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah

has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).¹

The primary assumption of interfaith dialogue is that it was Allah's wisdom and intention to create different nations and tribes. But the Qur'ān also asserts that it was Allah's intention that people would seek each other's acquaintance and learn from each other's differences.

Al-Islāh: *Al-Islāh* in the Qur'ān means bridge building, reconciliation, restoring relations, and resolving conflicts. It is a word that appears in many forms throughout the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān often calls bridge builders *Muṣliḥīn* and mischief makers as *Mufsidīn*. Therefore, the term is linked to the meaning of interfaith action for peaceful coexistence and for good relations through dialogue. *Sulh* from *al-Islāh* means peace building and conflict resolution. *Salāha* from *al-Islāh* means wishing the best, bridge building, and search for goodness. Almighty Allah says in the Qur'ān:

In most of their secret talks there is no good: but if one exhorts to a deed of charity or goodness or conciliation between people (secrecy is permissible): To him who does this, seeking the good pleasure of Allah, We shall soon give a reward of the highest (value).²

Almighty Allah recorded the dialogue between Shu'aib (AS) and his people in the Qur'ān and we find the term *al-Islāh* used as:

He said: "O my people! See ye whether I have a Clear (Sign) from my Lord, and He hath given me sustenance (pure and) good as from Himself? I wish not, in opposition to you, to do

¹Ibid, 49: 13.

²Ibid, 4: 114.

that which I forbid you to do. I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my power; and my success (in my task) can only from Allah. In Him I trust, and unto Him I turn.¹

Shu'aib (AS) was sent to the people of Madyan. They were a commercial people, and their besetting sin was commercial selfishness and fraudulent dealings in weights and measures. The Qur'an asks people to do justice on earth in all conditions:

To the Madyan people (We sent) Shu'aib, one of their own brethren: He said: "O my people! Worship Allah: ye have no other god but Him. And give not short measure or weight: I see you in prosperity, but I fear for you the Chastisement of a Day that will compass (you) all round. And O my people! Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due: Commit not evil in the land with intent to do mischief. That which is left you by Allah is best for you, if ye (but) believed....²

In many places the Qur'an calls the mischief makers as *Mufsidīn* and the bridge builders as *Muṣliḥīn*. Interfaith dialogue is nothing more but an effort to bring *al-Islāh* to bear in situations of the scapegoating of religions on the earth. *Al-Islāh* in the interfaith relations fosters good relations and peaceful coexistence.

Recognize that God is the One to Guide: Do not feel discouraged if people seem unconvinced by your beliefs, and are unwilling to share your faith. The Qur'an describes that Allah alone is the One to guide people's hearts. "This is the

¹Ibid, 11: 88.

²Ibid, 11: 84-6.

Guidance of Allah: He giveth that guidance to whom He pleaseth, of His servants....”¹

Part Kindly from those who Ridicule Faith: If someone persistently ridicules or mocks your faith and is obviously unwilling to listen to your point of view, quietly withdraw from the situation. Do not become angry or engage in arguments.

Already has He sent you in the Book, that when ye hear the Message of Allah held in defiance and ridicule, ye are not to sit with them unless they turn to a different theme: if ye did, ye would be like them. For Allah will collect the Hypocrites and those who defy Faith—all in Hell.²

Ease and Flexibility: Islam does not put hardships in one’s life but eases it through its principles. It supports ease as against hardship and narrow mindedness. Both the Qur’ān and the Sunnah propound this principle of ease and flexibility in the application of its rules. The Qur’ān states: “On no soul doth Allah place a burden greater than it can bear....”³ In a Ḥadīth it is mentioned: “I (the prophet) have been sent with the religion of ease.”⁴ Hence it becomes a good concern of Muslims in dialogue that the mind set and social condition of the people are kept in view to deal with them fairly. Flexibility in attitudes and treatment is desirable instead of creating hardships in the life of human beings as a whole.

In response to the question, by S.F. ‘Abd ar-Rahman, to what extent is it permissible to bring religions close together—referring towards participation in dialogue,—Sheikh Yusuf al-

¹Ibid, 6: 88.

²Ibid, 4: 140.

³Ibid, 2: 286.

⁴*Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Ḥadīth No. 39, cited in M. Taqi Amini, *Fiqh Islami ka Tarikhi Pas-i Manzar*, n.d., Lahore, 1986, p. 89.

Qaradawi says that ‘bringing religions close together’ comprises more than one meaning. Some are rejected and others are acceptable. It is not permissible to bring religions close together through deliberate attempts to disregard the main distinctions between them like those between the concept of Monotheism in Islam and that of the Trinity in Christianity or between the concept of Infallibility in the Islamic creed and Assimilation in the Jewish one. Therefore, he prefers that the title of the call be “A Dialogue between Religions,” rather than “Bringing religions close together” because it may be misunderstood. He also prefers to concentrate on the common grounds between the religions.¹ Commenting on the acceptable concepts of bringing the people of religions close together, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi says:

We Muslims are commanded by our Lord...to facilitate dialogue...in the best and most gracious way...if there are two ways of engaging in a dialogue, a good way and a better one, the Muslim is commanded to use the way that is better....²

He further says:

Together, we have to cooperate to confront the enemies of religious belief and the materialist proponents of creedal infidelity and behavioral libertinism. Together, we should also cooperate to face the propagators of nakedness, promiscuity, abortion and sexual perversion in all its forms....We have to stand together to advocate just causes and to stand by oppressed and helpless people, such as the Palestinians, the

¹Al-Qaradawi, Sheikh Yusuf, *Fiqh of Muslim Minorities–Contentious Issues & Recommended Solutions*, Al-Falah Foundation, Cairo, Egypt, 2003, pp. 15-20.

²Ibid, pp. 19-20.

Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Kashmir, as well as the blacks and colored people who are the victims of racial discrimination in the U.S. [and to stand by Indians who faced racial discrimination in Australia recently] and elsewhere. It is our duty to uphold oppressed people against oppressors and those who are arrogant on earth without a just cause; those who want to make Allah's servants their servants....Islam is against oppression. It stands by oppressed people regardless of their country, race, color or religion....This call for dialogue between religions should include spreading the spirit of tolerance, mercy and kindness rather than that of fanaticism, cruelty and violence in the social intercourse between people of different religions....The Muslim should take into consideration that judging people is not his responsibility, but it is attributed to Allah, the Judge, the Just, the Ever-Kindly and the Ever-Cognizant....the true Muslim does not favor the one whom he loves and does not oppress whom he hates, rather, he conveys the right to its due people, Muslim or non-Muslim, a friend or an enemy.¹

Although dialogue and peace making and reconciliation is inspired in Islam but as far as the faith or beliefs are concerned one can not be lenient in this matter. Though Muslims can tolerate any worldly loss to them or to their material possession, as is evident from the treaty of Hudaibiyah. No matter, if at some stage dialogue process will collapse, since then Muslims are not allowed to compromise with their faith horizons which stand above all. There was a time in Makkah

¹Ibid, pp. 22-26.

when although a storm of opposition had arisen in the pagan society of Quraish against the message of Islam preached by prophet Muhammad (SAAS), the Quraish chiefs had not yet lost hope that they would reach some sort of a compromise with him. Therefore, from time to time they would visit him (SAAS) with different proposals of compromise so that he may accept compromise and the dispute between them may end. In this connection, different traditions have been related in the Ḥadīth collection:

‘Abdullāh bin ‘Abbās narrated that the Quraish proposed to the prophet: “We shall give you so much wealth that you will become the richest man of Makkah. Further, we shall give you whichever woman you like in marriage and are prepared to follow and obey you as our leader on the condition that you will not speak ill of our gods. If you do not agree to this, we present another proposal which is to your and our advantage.” When the prophet asked what it was, they said that if he would worship their gods, Lāt and ‘Uzzā, for a year, they would worship his God for the same span of time. The Holy prophet said: “Wait awhile let me see what my Rabb (Lord) commands in this regard.” Thereupon the revelation Qul yā Ayyuhal kāfirūn came down.¹

According to another tradition from Ibn ‘Abbās: “The Quraish said to the prophet: “O Muhammad, if you kiss our gods (idols), we shall worship your God.” Thereupon, the *sūrah al-kāfirūn* was sent down (revealed).”² Yet in another tradition

¹*Sahīh al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyah Lil Albānī*, No. 206. See also *Tabarānī* and *Tabarī*. And see *Mousū’at al-Qur’ān al-Shāmilah*, CD-ROM, *Sharikatū Kasales Liddi’ayati wa al-’i'lān Majmū’atu Sharikāt Kasales al-Imārāt al-’Arabiyah al-Mutahidah*, UAE, 2007.

²Ibid.

Sa‘īd bin Mina (the freed slave of Abul Bakhtari) has related that:

Walīd bin Mughīrah, Āṣ bin Wa’il, Aswad bin al-Muttalib and Umayyah bin Khalaf met the prophet and said to him: “O Muhammad, let us agree that we would worship your God and you would worship our gods, and we would make you a partner in all our works. If what you have brought was better than what we possess, we would be partners in it with you, and have our share in it, and if what we possess is better than what you have brought, you would be partner in it with us and have your share of it.” At this Allah sent down: Qul yā Ayyuhal Kafirūn.¹

Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Hishām also has related the later incident in the *Sīrah* (Biography of prophet Muhammad). Because of these repeated dialogues, there was a need that the Quraish be given a definite, decisive reply so that their hope of prophet Muhammad (SAAS) coming to terms with them on the principle of “give and take” would be frustrated for ever. Therefore, Almighty Allah commanded His messenger, Muhammad (SAAS):

Say: O ye that reject Faith! I worship not that which ye worship, nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship, nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your Way, and to me mine.²

That makes the point clear that whenever and wherever the dialogue reaches to that stage where Muslims are in danger as far as their ‘Aqīdah (belief) is concerned they have no choice

¹Ibid.

²The Qur’ān, 109: 1-6.

but to quit from that kind of dialogue. Though there can be many issues were they can compromise in totality or can take a middle path of their view and the view presented by the opposite side.

CHAPTER IV

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DIALOGUE

The history of interfaith dialogue is as ancient as the religions since men and women when not at war with their neighbors have always made an effort to understand them, nor least because understanding is a strategy for defense, but also because for as long as there is dialogue wars are delayed. History records many examples of interfaith initiatives and dialogue throughout the ages. The Madinah document implemented during the life of prophet Muhammad (SAAS) is an excellent example of understanding and harmony between faith communities. During the period of *al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* (Rightly Guided Caliphs), the Muslims showed the same attitude towards the people of other religions and cultures. The expansion of Islam had taken place under these *Khulafā'* (Caliphs) in a good deal and their dealings with other religions followed genuine and just basis. The people of the conquered lands enjoyed all the basic freedoms. Payment of *kharāj* (land revenue), *jazyah* (protection tax) by them was in the wider interests of social stability.¹ This is followed by the manifold developments during the Umayyads and the early Abbasids. In this period the Muslims, on the one hand, developed their intellectual sciences and, on the other, devoted themselves to the study of other religions and cultures independently. They studied Greek sciences, translated and used them in the development of their own sciences, particularly *falsafah* (philosophy) and *kalām* (scholasticism). This depicts that the existing cults of knowledge and religion were made accessible by them and explored the possibility of formulating the unities and harmonies in the world of diversities and dissensions. Dissensions were not witnessed from the external side only but they were found within as

¹For details see Abu Yusuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, n.d., Karachi.

well.¹ This led, among other things, promulgation of Islam in a rational and argumentative way. It was partly a response to queries of the newly converts to Islam and partly to forge Islamic development of intellectual discourses and sciences on the wider basis. *Ilm al-kalām* is the best example of it about which Louis Gardet amplifies as following:

The appearances of the three main politico-religious traditions, Khārijī, Shī‘ī and Sunnī, set before Muslim thinkers the problem of the validity of the Imama...and the “status of the believer” which the imam must possess. Thence arose the question of faith and the conditions of salvation and the question of man’s responsibility or lack of responsibility; then, as parallel considerations, the nature of the Kur’ān (created or not created) and hence the stress laid upon the divine attribute of the Word; then finally, the more general problem of the divine attributes, their existence and their connexion [sic] with the divine essence, and its Unity. Many other questions were added in course of time but already at this early period—the age of the Umayyads and the early ‘Abbāsids—the essential themes which were to constitute ‘ilm al-kalam had arisen. Whatever may have been the effect of external influences—discussions with Mazdean Zanadika on good and evil in human actions or with the Christian theologians of Damascus on the Word of God, and the discovery of Greek science and philosophy—kalām tended at first to take shape over specifically Muslim problems. The external influences probably had some effect as a result of the controversies, emphasizing some aspects

¹See Abu Zahra Misri, *Tārīkh Madhahib Islāmiyah*, n.d., Egypt.

of the subjects dealt with, giving direction to the choice of arguments and (still more, perhaps) the methods of argumentation. The fact remains, however, that ‘ilm al-kalām is certainly not an Arab adaptation of Mazdean or Christian theology but arose within the Muslim community, where it preserved its originality.¹

Another direction of this Muslim development was studying rationally and critically the other religions. It was more in the backdrop of their direct encounter with as well as interest in other religious traditions. They thought that it was their obligation to understand other religions and cultures in order to verify their truths and laws objectively. To them, the effort was also meant to comprehend and explain the fact of religious diversity in the purview of their belief in the unity of Truth, the unity of mankind and unity of life. It was there own intellectual integrity and honesty that made them to make discourses upon the nature, scope and function of religion on the one hand and to understand the creeds, cults, customs and conducts of differing religious circles on the other. To make their discourses and studies more realistic and authentic they had to undergo through many odds viz searching the original sources, texts and learning the language of these texts. To this genre belong Abdul Karim Shahristani’s *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, Abul Qadir Baghdadi’s *Kitāb al-’Usūl al-Dīn*, Abu Raihan al-Biruni’s *Kitāb al-Hind* and Ibn Hazm’s *Kitāb al-Fasl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwa wa al-Nihal* particularly which depict their serious concern about the objective understanding of other religions and verify critically actual nature of deviations and differences among the people. Such endeavours became productive for both the Muslims and the non-Muslims in terms of their mutual understanding and harmonious living for times to come. That is why the non-Muslim scholars like Franz

¹*Encyclopedia of Islam*, qv. ‘Ilm al Kalam’, cited in infra n. 18.

Rosenthal acknowledge the contribution of Muslim scholarship:

The comparative study of religion has been rightly acclaimed as one of the great contributions of Muslim civilization to mankind's intellectual progress. Bestriding the middle zone of the Oikeumene, Medieval Islam had contact with many religions and probably all conceivable types of religious experience....There were also two possible ways to confront the challenge arising out of the multiplicity of competing religions. It could either be blandly ignored or it could be met head on. Greatly to our benefit, Muslim intellectuals chose the second alternative.¹

These developments, among other things, are reflective of many important features of the Muslim discourse and dialogue. Although in some places they were conquering minorities yet made unprejudiced acknowledgement and understanding of other faiths and cultures. Their promotion of rational promulgation of Islam and developing sound intellectual sciences were learnt by the western students in the formers learning centers and colleges of Cordova, Toledo and Granada and later on transmitted to their own lands that paved the way for their present scientific development.² The world is much indebted to Islam in its promotion of living in pluralistic societies with peace and tolerance and its examples are seen in the state of Madinah and the later Muslim empires of Spain,

¹Cited in Ghulam Haider Aasi, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions–A Study of Ibn Hazm's Kitāb al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Nihāl*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Islamabad, Pakistan, 1992, p. 32.

²See Basil B. Koshul, 'Islamic Impact on Western Civilization Reconsidered'; *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Association of Muslim Social Scientists and International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, USA, vol. 12, No. 1, April 1995, pp. 40-3.

Ottoman, Turkey and India. Interfaith dialogue and action has taken place for many centuries. The Muslim Emperors for example, encouraged tolerance in India, a diverse nation with people of various faith backgrounds, including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Christianity. Muslim Spain is an additional historical example of great religious pluralism. Another example of historical coexistence between people of different faiths has been in the Balkans under the administration of the Ottoman Turks from 15th to 19th centuries. Catholic and Orthodox Christians as well as Muslims, Jews and Sufis have dwelled in harmony for hundreds of years in this region (despite some small incidents). Karen Armstrong, under the title ‘The Meaning of Dialogue’, says:

In the past, despite lamentable failures in coexistence, Jews, Christians and Muslims often learned from one another. In Islamic Spain, for example, Jews and Christians found that the encounter with Islam gave them new insight into their own religious traditions; scholars from other parts of Europe came to al-Andalus to study with Muslims, who helped them to recover the classical learning that they had lost during the Dark Ages. They thus transformed Western society.¹

Around a thousand years ago, Muslim Spain stood for a civilized society encouraging and supporting religious and ethnic pluralism, free debate; libraries and colleges open for all, free education with incentives for excellence, public baths and parks, poetry and architecture, and above all respect for

¹Karen Armstrong, ‘The Meaning of Dialogue’, in *Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue*, Dr. John J. DeGioia, Ed., World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland, 2008, p. 12.

humanity and human endeavors.¹ A quotation from Thomas Arnold regarding the contrasting status of Christian Arabs under Muslim rule captures an Islamic perspective of the message of interfaith dialogue and its necessity:

Had attempts been made to convert the Christians by force when they first came under Mohammedan rule, it would not have been possible for Christians to have survived among them up to the times of the Abbasid caliphs. From...the toleration extended toward the Christian Arabs by the victorious Muslims of the first century of Hijrah and continued by succeeding generations, we may surely infer that those Christian tribes that embraced Islam did so of their own choice and free will. The Christian Arabs of the present day, dwelling in the midst of a Mohammedan population, are a living testimony of this toleration.²

Furthermore, according to William Montgomery Watt:

During the caliphate of 'Umar (634-44) the Muslim armies conquered most of Syria, Egypt and Iraq, and the Christians there received the status of protected minorities, and were under no compulsion to become Muslims. This meant that the Muslims living in these provinces had opportunities of conversing with Christians, and some of the Christians were able to produce strong arguments against Islam by showing the

¹Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam Today*, I. B. Tauris Publishers, New York, 2001, p. 62.

²Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, second edition, Constable, London, 1913, pp. 50-2 and 96 in Mohammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, USA, 2007, p. 80.

discrepancies between the Qur'ān and the Bible. The Qur'ānic perception of Christianity, when applied in this situation, was clearly inadequate. It could not be abandoned, however, without rejecting the Qur'ān and so Muslim scholars began to elaborate some aspects of that perception in such a way as to weaken the anti-Islamic arguments.¹

Therefore dialogue remained a tool to ensure peace. One can not also forget the intra-faith dialogues between supporters of 'Alī (RA) and supporters of Āishah (RA) prior to the battle of *Jamal* (Camel). Hasan (RA) arrived at Kufah on a Friday at the time of noon day prayers, and he proceeds straight away to the main *masjid*. The agents and supporters of 'Alī (RA) were present there. Hasan (RA) had a dialogue there which has been recorded as:

...He [Hasan (RA)] exhorted the people to strengthen the hands of Ali in his fight against those who wanted to sow discord among the Muslims. Some of the people raised shouts in favor of Ayesha. To these people, Imam Hasan posed the question: "Did God not enjoin upon Ayesha the duty of living quietly in her house, and leaving it to the men to fight in the battle-field until the sedition was quelled? What an irony of fate that she should command us to do her part, and has taken upon herself to do our part."

At this stage, Zaid bin Sehwan a prominent citizen of Kufa rose up to say that he had received a letter from Ayesha wherein she had

¹William Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian encounters Perceptions and misperceptions*, Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane London EC4P 4EE and Routledge 29 west 35th street New York, NY 10001, 1991, p. 30.

advised the people of Kufa to remain in their houses and not to take part in any fight. At this Imam Hasan put the following question to the assembly: "Is it not strange that she should advise the citizens of Kufa to abstain from fighting while she is herself leading a fight against the citizens of Basra." Abu Musa Ashari took the stage, and said that in this crises when two parties of the Muslims were at logger heads, the best course for the people of Kufa was to remain neutral. Thereafter a long dialogue followed between Imam Hassan and Abu Musa Ashari. Imam Hasan asked Abu Musa Ashari the question: "Did Talha and Zubair not take oath of allegiance to Ali?" Abu Musa said that they had taken the oath. Then Imam Hasan asked the question: "What wrong had Ali done to justify Talha and Zubair revolt against him?" Abu Musa said that he was not aware of any reason which could justify the revolt of Talha and Zubair. Imam Hasan next asked "If some one revolts against established authority, will such authority not be authorized to take action against those who have revolted?" Abu Musa answered the question in affirmation. "Then on what ground you do not justify the action that Ali, the duly elected Caliph, has taken against those who have rebelled against the authority?" Abu Musa said that his ground was that it would lead to bloodshed among the Muslims. "But why should the Muslims help those who have rebelled against authority, when God enjoined the faithful to obey those in authority?" Asked Imam Hasan, and to this question Abu Musa had no reply. Imam Hasan next inquired of Abu Musa whether he had taken the oath of allegiance to Ali, and Abu Musa replied to this

question in the affirmative. “You owe your office of the Governor to Ali” was the next question, and to this question again Abu Musa answered “Yes”. “Are you not under an obligation to obey the command of the Caliph, and not to do any act which helps his enemies directly or indirectly,” Imam Hasan asked, and this question was also answered in the affirmative. Imam Hasan thereafter posed the following question: “Your Caliph asks you to help him in his fight against his enemies. His enemies have asked the people of Kufa to remain confined to their houses and not to participate in the war. You also ask the people of Kufa to abstain from war. This means that by your acts you are helping the enemies of the Caliph although you have taken the oath of allegiance to him and owe your appointment to him, this is sedition.” To this Abu Musa had no answer.¹

On the other side of the story ‘Alī (RA) had led his army to Basra. But he felt that those who are against him are under some misunderstanding. In his quest for peace, ‘Alī (RA) sent a peace mission to ‘Āishah (RA), headed by Qa‘aqa‘ bin ‘Umro (RA). ‘Alī (RA) desired that the negotiations between the parties should be a heart to heart dialogue, and every possible effort should be made to remove the misunderstandings between the parties. The mission was received by ‘Āishah (RA), Talha (RA), and Zubair (RA) with due courtesy. They said that they would be glad if the misunderstandings were removed and unity among the Muslims was restored. Thereafter dialogue started between the two groups:

¹The *Alim*, CD-ROM, ISL Software Corporation, Washington DC, USA, 2000. See also Akbar Shah Najeeb Abadi, *Tarikh-i Islam* (Urdu), Farid Book Depot Private Ltd., Delhi, 2000, vol. I, pp. 447-9.

Qa'aqa inquired of Ayesha as to what were the objects before her which had prompted her to take to the field. She said that the objects before her were to seek vengeance for the blood of Othman, and to promote the cause of Islam.

With regard to the issue about the vengeance for the blood of Othman, Qa'aqa posed the question, "Mother, tell me, keeping God in view, whether you accuse Ali for the murder of Othman as a criminal or as an accomplice?" Ayesha said that she did not accuse Ali for involvement in the assassination of Othman; her grievance was that as Caliph, Ali had not taken any action to apprehend the murderers of Othman. Qa'aqa then asked whether such murder was the act of one man, or was it the act of a mob. Ayesha said that obviously it was the act of a mob. Qa'aqa next asked the question, "Have things settled down after the murder of Othman". Ayesha said that the things were still very much in a state of disarray. Qa'aqa thereupon said, "If things are still unsettled, how could Ali take action against the people who were still in control of the situation, and from whom another coup could be expected?" To this question, Ayesha, Talha or Zubair had no satisfactory answer.

Qa'aqa then posed another question, "Do you know that by rebelling against the authority of Ali you have done great harm to the cause for the vengeance of the blood of Othman?" "How was that?" asked Ayesha. Qa'aqa said, "By rebelling against the authority of Ali, you have forced Ali to deal with you instead of dealing with the murderers of Othman. In this crises, Ali

had naturally to seek allies, and when you have forsaken Ali those who had rebelled against Othman have come to the aid of Ali in large numbers, because they feel that the troubles of Ali are because of them. Things have thus moved in a vicious circle, and by rebelling against Ali you have thrown him in the lap of the persons from whom you seek vengeance. By your action you have strengthened the murderers of Othman, and weakened the Muslims." That set Ayesha thinking, and she could not know how the argument advanced by Qa'aqa could be met.

Qa'aqa then took up the question of promoting the cause of Islam. He pointed out that when the Muslims were united under Abu Bakr and Umar they made large conquests both in the east and the west. In the early years of the caliphate of Othman the process of conquests continued. When the Muslims rebelled against the authority of Othman, and came to be divided among themselves the process of conquest came to a grinding halt. He observed that the enemies of Islam were on the borders of the Muslim State ready to take advantage of any division in the ranks of the Muslims. Qa'aqa posed the question, "How can you promote the cause of Islam, if you seek to divide the Muslims for one cause or the other?"...Addressing Talha and Zubair he said: "Did you not take the oath of allegiance to Ali?..."

The arguments advanced by Qa'aqa had their way. They were most effective and impressive. Ayesha asked Qa'aqa, "Then, what do you suggest?" He said, "I suggest that instead of

fighting make peace. Strengthen the hands of Ali, and when law and order is fully established the Muslims acting in concert should determine how the vengeance for the blood of Othman could be taken." Thereupon Ayesha said, "If that be the view of Ali as well, we agree to make peace on honorable terms." Qa'aqa respectfully took leave of Ayesha, and returned to Ali to report the success of his mission.¹

Hence, through the dialogue process held between the two parties, a great nightmare was averted which could have proved fatal to both the parties. Instead of fighting they agreed to negotiate on some acceptable terms so that peace could prevail. Furthermore, within the period of 100 years, after the death (demise) of prophet Muhammad (SAAS) the Muslim empire extended over half of the world which opened avenues for cross-religious and cross-cultural fertilization of humankind. Nevertheless, the Muslims made a significant contribution in studying the religious history of humankind thereby augmenting the common fund of human knowledge. Muslim scholars were obliged to comprehend and explain the fact of religious diversity in the shade of their belief in the unity of Truth, the unity of humankind, and the unity of life. Therefore, they reflected upon the nature, scope and function of religion on the one hand and to understand the creeds, cults, customs, and conducts of the differing religious groups on the other. Thus, the four categories of the literature were produced:

- (a) Accounts of personal dialogues between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, a kind of participatory dialogue; (b) treatises aimed at persuading others and converting them to one's faith with an accent on religious disagreements; (c) refutation of other religious traditions, often

¹The *Alim*, CD-ROM, ISL Software Corporation, Washington DC, USA, 2000. See also Akbar Shah Najeeb Abadi, op. cit., pp. 449-51.

by converts who sought to justify their own conversions, or responses to general polemical writings advanced against Islam, or writings seeking to inform the general public about these polemics; and (d) general studies of religions not motivated primarily by polemical or apologetic consideration, but which were concerned with the more serious business of comprehending the unity of Truth and the diversity of religious traditions, i.e., a systematic study of the nature and function of religious phenomena, the nature of truth-claims of diverse religious traditions, the division of religions into various sects, and the process of religious development and change. The studies in the fourth category are generally known as al-Milal wa al-Nihal.¹

In the year 781 C.E. Timothy, a Christian and head of the Nestorians in Iraq had two days of discussion with the Caliph al-Mahdī. He wrote an account of this in Syriac, later on translated into Arabic, and more recently into English. The work gives considerable insight into the state of dialogue between the two faiths at that time. A part of the dialogue has been mentioned by William Montgomery Watt as:

Among minor questions are why Christians face east in worship, why they worship the cross, and why they are not circumcised....

The Caliph began by accusing the Christians of believing that God married a woman and begat a son, and later asked how begetting could be possible without genital organs. He also insisted that Jesus cannot be divine, since the eternal

¹Ghulam Haider Aasi, op.cit., pp. 32-33.

cannot be born in time. He quoted the phrase “I go to my God and your God” (John 20:17), and referred to Jesus worshipping God and praying....Timothy frequently speaks of Jesus as the Word of God, and to this the caliph cannot object since the term is used in the Qur’ān, though he insists that the word is created (as is also the Spirit of God). The caliph also holds that, if Jesus died, this shows he is not God, since God cannot die....

The caliph repeats the allegation that the Jews and Christians have corrupted the scriptures (35, 56-8), though the chief defect seems to be that prophecies of the coming of Muḥammad have been removed. He is also aware that there are four gospels, and asks about how they came to be written down (47-9, 60). He specifically mentions that the promise in the gospel of the coming of the Paraclete refers to Muḥammad (33-5), as well as that to the Israelites of the coming of a prophet like Moses from their brothers (50ff.), and the phrase about the rider on a camel from Isaiah (21:7), which Timothy takes to refer to the fall of Babylon to Cyrus (37ff.).¹

The dialogue between a Muslim, ‘abd-Allāh ibn Ismā‘īl al-Hāshimī and a Christian, ‘abd al-Masīḥ ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, in the reign of the caliph al-Ma’mūn (813-33 C.E.) is also a testimony of dialogue which used to take place between the adherents of different faiths.² Ibn Hazm, a Muslim scholar and writer of eleventh century, remained engaged in different kinds of dialogues with scholars of other faiths of his time, throughout his life.

¹William Montgomery Watt, op.cit., pp. 63-4.

²See for details, Ibid., p. 64.

Ibn Hazm's study of the religious history of mankind is based on what may be called a dialectical-dialogical method. Both "dialectic" and "dialogue" are meant here in their generic as well as in their literal sense. He analysed religious data according to the rules of logic and dialectics, and engaged himself in dialogue with the leading scholars of other religious traditions in his time.¹

The countless dialogetic meetings were also held in the caliphal courts of Damascus, Baghdad and Cordova. Interfaith dialogue remained the subject of salon conversation, a public pastime. Thus, the discipline of comparative religion (*'Ilm al-Milal wa al-Nihal*) was innovated.² David Thomas in his introduction to his book 'Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule' writes:

Baghdad became a center of a civil society where members of different faiths mixed with confidence and freedom, intellectual and religious influences extended in all directions, and relations between scholars, professionals and many of the common populace flourished in ways that prohibit any over simple account in which Muslims looked upon their client Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians.³

Christians felt free to dialogue with their Muslim counterparts and were received warmly by the same. A Muslim theologian

¹Ghulam Haider Aasi, op.cit., p. 74.

²See Isma'il Raji al Fārūqī, Ed., *Triologue of the Abrahamic faiths*, second edition, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, Virginia, 1986, Foreword.

³David Thomas, *Christians at the heart of Islamic Rule*, BRILL, 2003, p. vii.

of eighth century namely Hisham ibn al-Hakim reports that a Christian leader named Bahira along with other priests came to dialogue with him:

While I was seated in my shop at the Karakh gate with people around me reciting the Qur'an for me, suddenly there appeared a crowd of Christians, both priests and others, about a hundred men all in black with hood cloaks, and among them was the chief Patriarch Bahira. They stopped at my shop, and my chair was offered to Bahira. He sat on it and the Bishop and monks stood around leaning on their staffs, with their hooded cloaks over their heads.¹

Thus they had a dialogue over the matters of faith² and with these kinds of processes enriched the co-existent society, from which both the communities got benefited. Furthermore, the Muslim rule of Spain is known as Golden Period, which paved the way for mutual understanding and interfaith co-operation. It was the first true cosmopolitan culture in the west. The classical works were translated into Arabic and Spanish languages cordially. Aristotle's work on physics and natural history was translated from Greek into Arabic. The Universities of Toledo, Cordova, Seville, and Granada also played a very important role in establishing and developing the socio, religious, and civilizational co-existence as the students bearing different socio, religious, and cultural backgrounds, equally came to these seats of learning, hence paved the way for mutual understanding through informal dialogues.³ After the death of prophet Muhammad (SAAS) in the period of pious caliphate, Muslims conquered many countries and extended

¹See David Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 4.

²Ibid.

³See Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, International Institute of Islamic thought, Herndon, USA, 2007, pp. 78-9.

their rule to Iraq, Syria, Egypt and North Africa. And in the later period of Umayyad's, Muslim rule extended more. Due to the cultural and civilizational interaction and specially interaction of different religious groups, many questions and queries took birth which were tried to be answered. Muslims now had the access to the Greek civilization and they translated Greek knowledge into Arabic. Some Muslim theologians now became interested in Greek philosophical and scientific conceptions, and began to use some of these in their arguments against adherents of other faiths and against Muslims, with whom they disagreed, thus gave birth to the science of *kalām* in Muslims. A scholar discussing about this science writes:

...It brought into focus some perennial problems which every great religious community has had to address: the problems concerning the nature of faith, of evil, of sinners, of free-will and predestination, of the essence and attributes of God, of the nature of revelation, of the tension between reason and revelation, and so on. Disputation and argumentation on these problems gave birth to the Muslim science of discursive reasoning and argumentation commonly, though not necessarily correctly, known as 'Ilm al-Kalām, and is also called systematic rational theology or dialectical theology.

It is possible that this area of intellectual discourse might have been influenced, to some extent, by non-Muslim religious sources because many converts from other religious traditions (or their descendants) now wrote treatises as Muslim *kalām* scholars. These *kalām* scholars wrote treatises to argue that their views conformed to the tradition and were sound. They also refuted the views of their

adversaries as deviations from, and innovations in, the teachings of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. In the course of such refutations and counter-refutations, and in the course of the attempts to support certain politico-religious attitudes by means of rational arguments reinforced by interpretations of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth, there emerged many intellectual trends and schools of thought which were later known as *fīraq* (groups) or *nīḥal* (philosophies or ideologies).

As soon as the *Mutakallimūn* came in closer contact with the adherents of other religious traditions and had direct access to their scriptures, traditions and theological works, they tried to work out parallels between non-Muslim religious doctrines and the deviating or innovating religious positions taken by some Muslims. Reflecting upon the history of other religious traditions they inferred that all deviating religious groups, whether from within the Muslim community or from other religious traditions, are primarily deviations from the one true religion known by its generic term, Islam. This also provided them with a modus operandi to deal with the internal religious diversity in the Muslim community and the religious diversity of mankind.

The *mutakallimūn* were the first to defend the Islamic doctrines against internal deviations, and to present Islam on grounds of reason and logical consistency. They were also the first generation of Muslim religious scholars who

engaged themselves in disputations with scholars of other religious traditions.¹

Thus it is evident that the *mutakallimūn* were engaged in dialogues at both levels i.e., intra-personal, inter-personal and intra-faith, inter-faith. Hence science of *kalām* used to be one among the shadows of dialogue though not comparable to the dialogue as an institution of contemporary world. The aforementioned scholar further says:

In course of time, when the science of *kalām* developed its essential principle of harmony between reason and revelation, that the religion truth-claims should be verifiable by reason and common sense and be in conformity with historical facts, the *mutakallimūn* became inclined to include in their treatises the data on other religious traditions. They tried to work out some basic structure behind all deviation from the truth and tried to correlate Muslim deviating tendencies with the views and doctrines of earlier religious traditions. The common religious categories they adopted for their analysis of deviating beliefs, whether internal or external, were the universality of revelation, religious scriptures, prophecy, and the consensus of the reliable witnesses and transmitters through an unbroken line of critically attested transmission (*naql mutawātir; tawātur*). It was on the basis of these religious categories, in addition to the principles of reason and consistency, that Muslim studies of other religious traditions were produced. This genre of Muslim literature is called al-Milal wa al-

¹Ghulam Haider Aasi, op.cit., pp. 27-9.

Nihal (Religious Traditions and Philosophical Ideologies).¹

Commenting about the origin of the science of *kalām* the aforementioned scholar writes:

It is generally believed that the mutakallimūn started their philosophical theology after their interaction with the Damascene Christian theologians such as John of Damascus and other church Fathers who engaged them in theological issues such as those concerning the Word of God. However, Aḥmad Amīn maintains that the *kalām* studies first struck their roots in Iraq when the mutakallimūn began to engage in disputations with Manichaeans and Dualists. These treatises have been lost except for some excerpts in later works.²

Whatever the reason of the origin of the science of *kalām* in Muslims were, one is bound to recognize that by this science of *kalām* Muslims were engaged in dialogues in its (*kalām*) glorious period. Continuing these truly Islamic traditions, Muslim organizations, scholars and individuals in Europe and America and many Islamic organizations, political parties, scholars and individuals in the Muslim world ought to support interfaith dialogue in the contemporary world.

The twenty-first century poses new and difficult challenges for Muslims. On the one hand, many forces within Western media are committed to labeling Muslims as terrorists and to using all their technical know-how to foment prejudice. On the other hand, the Muslim population is growing. Accordingly, Islam is emerging as a

¹Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²Ibid., pp. 34-5.

force in a society that has little exposure to religious diversity. Europe and America are emerging as lands of many religions and faiths where people of different ethnic groups and races are trying to live together in peace. In response to this growing diversity of which they themselves are a significant part, Muslims ought to become more proactive in urging interfaith dialogue. They ought to be torchbearers, winning the hearts and minds of people as peacemakers. Imams, religious leaders, and scholars, holding fast to Islamic principles of dialogue, should become leaders in building world peace....Islam is re-emerging on the world scene as a framework for peace, justice, and dialogue.¹

Dialogue is unavoidable in the contemporary world because the world in which we live is like a village. Everything is near and close to be influenced with and examine to. Dialogue makes people to understand each others view point and a society of peace and prosperity finds its way to exist.

Interfaith dialogue has grown and inter-religious contacts have increased in the modern period. The so-called New World Order makes cross-religious and cross-cultural contacts practically unavoidable as television, radio, film, books and the Internet all work to narrow the gulfs that once separated religions and cultures. The world is rapidly changing. Globalization of the modern world has made it impossible for the believers of one religion to be indifferent to another, cross-cultural and inter-religious contacts are unavoidable. It is becoming more and more

¹Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims, op. cit., pp. 82-3.

difficult for any religious, ethnic group, or race to remain unaware of the teachings and practice of other religions and cultures.

Despite the ongoing and current conflicts and violence, there are many Muslims [sic] communities and individuals who live in peace and cooperation with non-Muslims around the world. The media tend to ignore these stories and experiences and to focus instead on violent clashes or events. Yet those committed to interfaith dialogue must not be deterred by the media's indifference. Interfaith dialogues are perfect settings not only for nurturing such positive and constructive Muslim and non-Muslim relations, but also for spreading them abroad and for allowing such relationships to be the guiding model for interaction.

One such model is based on an event in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. When St. Francis arrived in Damietta, Egypt during the Fifth Crusade, he was agonized to see the destruction caused by the crusaders. So when he afterwards met with Sultan al Kamil, a local Muslim leader, he was amazed to see the Sultan receiving him courteously and treating him well. Ricoldo de Monte Croce from the Assisi Order spent some twenty year traveling through the Middle East and wrote a very impressive account of his good relations and friendly encounters with Muslims.¹

Many Muslims played key roles in promoting interfaith dialogue even during the Crusades and Colonial occupation—the worst days in Muslim history. While always opposing

¹Ibid., p. 81.

political occupation, these Muslims never ceased or fore closed the channels of dialogue with people of other faiths. The activities of dialogue between faiths are alive in our age. In early 20th century dialogue started to take place between the Abrahamic faiths—Christianity, Judaism and Islam. In 1960s interfaith movement gathered interest. In 1965 the Roman Catholic Church issued the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*, instituting major policy changes in the Catholic Church's policy towards non-Christian faiths. In late 1960s interfaith groups joined around Civil Rights issues for African-Americans and later were often vocal in their opposition to the Vietnam War. In 1998, Mohammad Khatami addressed an international audience at the United Nations General Assembly in New York to delineate his main arguments. In his speech to the General Assembly, Mohammad Khatami proposed:

...The question is how the United Nations may undertake the necessary measures to respond to this evolving global climate, and what impact it will have on the changing course of the life of mankind longing for salvation. I would like to propose, in the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran, that the United Nations, as a first step, designate the year 2001 as the "Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations," with the earnest hope that through such a dialogue, the realization of universal justice and liberty may be initiated. Among the worthiest achievements of this century is the acceptance of the necessity and significance of dialogue and rejection of force, promotion of understanding in cultural, economic and political fields, and strengthening of the foundations of liberty, justice and human rights. Establishment and enhancement of civility, whether at national or international level, is contingent upon dialogue among societies and civilizations representing various

views, inclinations and approaches. If humanity at the threshold of the new century and millennium devotes all efforts to institutionalize dialogue, replacing hostility and confrontation with discourse and understanding, it would leave an invaluable legacy for the benefit of the future generations.¹

The General Assembly, on the proposal of President Mohammad Khatami of Iran, by its resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998, expressed its firm determination to facilitate and promote dialogue among civilizations and decided “to proclaim the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations”² and recognized “the diverse civilizational achievements of mankind, crystallizing cultural pluralism and creative human diversity”³. The year 2001 was designated by the United Nations as “the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations” at the dawn of the new millennium. It was a major move based on relevant resolutions adopted by three successive UN General Assemblies and promoted vigorously by the United Nations. The Iranian government subsequently founded the International Centre for Dialogue among Civilizations (ICDAC) in February 1999. UNESCO has actively pursued the implementation of the United Nations Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and “The

¹Statement by H.E. Mohammad Khatami President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, before the 53rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, September 21, 1998
http://www.parstimes.com/history/khatami_speech_un.html

²Resolutions and Decisions adopted by the General Assembly during its fifty-third session, Volume 1; Resolutions 9 September – 18 December 1998, General Assembly Official Records – Fifty-third Session Supplement No. 49 (A/53/49), United Nations, New York, 1999, 28-9.

³Resolutions and Decisions adopted by the General Assembly during its fifty-fourth session Volume 1; Resolutions 14 September – 23 December 1999, General Assembly Official Records – Fifty-fourth Session Supplement No. 49(A/54/49), United Nations, New York, 2000, 56.

UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity¹ was adopted unanimously by the General Conference at its 31st session on 2nd November 2001. Mohammad Khatami regards dialogue among civilizations itself as an alternative paradigm for international relations:

The notion of dialogue among civilizations undoubtedly bears numerous theoretical and analytic questions. I do not want to downplay the importance of such intellectual and academic undertakings. I would rather want to stress that in formulating this proposal, the Islamic Republic of Iran presents an alternative paradigm for international relations. This should become clearer when we take comparative notice of prevailing paradigms of the international relations. It is up to us to find the grounds for replacing it with a new one. In order to call governments and peoples of the world to follow the new paradigm of dialogue among cultures and civilizations, we ought to learn from the world's past experience, especially from the tremendous human catastrophes that took place in the 20th century. We ought to critically examine the prevalent, and the glorification of might. From an ethical perspective, the paradigm of dialogue among civilizations requires that we abandon the will-to-power and instead pursue compassion, understanding, and love. The ultimate goal of dialogue among civilizations is not dialogue in and of itself, but attaining empathy and compassion.²

¹UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, UNESCO, France, 2002.

²The Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's speech at the U.N.-sponsored Conference of Dialogue Among Civilizations in New York on 5

He further emphasized:

The proposal for a dialogue among civilizations builds upon the study of cultural geography of various fields of civilization. Yet the unique and irreplaceable role of governments should never be overlooked in this process. In the absence of governmental commitment to their affirmative vote to the resolution on dialogue among civilizations cannot maintain high hopes for the political consequences of proposal. Member states of the United Nations should endeavour to remove barriers from the way of dialogue among cultures and civilizations, and should abide by the basic precondition of dialogue. This fundamental principle rejects any imposition, and builds upon the premises that all parties to dialogue stand on essentially equal footing.¹

Kofi Annan, in a speech on February 5, 2001 to Seton Hall University's School of Diplomacy and International Relations in South Orange New Jersey, declared the Dialogue among Civilizations as appropriate and necessary answer to the notion of an inevitable clash of civilizations in following words:

...In what sense, then, is the dialogue among civilizations a useful concept? First, it is an appropriate and necessary answer to the notion of an inevitable clash of civilizations. As such, it

September. Trans. By The U.S. Federal Broadcasting Information Servicece (FBIS), September 8, 2000.
<http://wwwiranian.com/Opinion/2000/September/Khatami/>.

¹The Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's speech at the U.N.-sponsored Conference of Dialogue Among Civilizations in New York on 5 September. Translated by the U.S. Federal Broadcasting Information Service, September 8, 2000.
<http://wwwiranian.com/Opinion/2000/September/Khatami/>.

provides a useful context for advancing cooperation over conflict. Second, it helps us draw on the deeper, ancient roots of cultures and civilizations to find what unites us across all boundaries, and shows us that the past can provide signposts to unity just as easily as to enmity. Third, and perhaps most important, the dialogue can help us to discern the role of culture and civilization in contemporary conflicts, and so to distinguish propaganda and false history from the real causes of war. That, in turn, should ease the path to peace.¹

John L. Esposito offers some views about the significance of such dialogue in the international relations dimension. “In the continued encounter of Islam and the West in the twenty-first century, Khatami’s dialogue of civilizations reflects a significant perspective.”² Persistent progress of dialogues among civilizations or cultures or faiths will not only benefit the healthy development of human civilization, but also be conducive to the healthy evolution of international relations. Moreover, in October 2006, thirty eight leading clerics and academics endorsed an open letter in which they noted that Christianity and Islam together make up more than 55% of world’s population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. They called the Pope arguably the single most influential voice in continuing to move this relationship forward in the direction of mutual understanding. The signatories rejected any connection between Islam and illegitimate violence, and insisted strongly on the compatibility of Islam with reason. They supported the Pope’s call for “frank and sincere dialogue” and acknowledge

¹Kofi Annan, “Dialogue among Civilizations,” Presidents & Prime Ministers, January 2001, 25.

²Esposito, John L., *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003, 139.

his apology. The letter concluded: "...We hope that we will all avoid the mistakes of the past and live together in the future in peace, mutual acceptance and respect...."¹ Muslim efforts to engage the Pope in direct dialogue continued in 2007 with the release in October of a letter signed by one hundred and thirty eight leaders, 'A Common Word Between Us and You', that proposed theological and ethical commonalities across between Islam and Christianity as a basis for far-reaching dialogue and engagement.

A conference was sponsored in July 2007 under the title, 'We Were Born to Live Together', by the Abraham Fund, which centers its efforts on Jews and Arab Muslims living in Palestine and Israel. It was designed to raise awareness about the complexities underlying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially in the Jewish-Arab mixed region of Galilee. Coexistent activities, grassroots of conflict and new thinking in government were the issues on which speakers throw light.²

In June 2008 Makkah Conference was held on Inter-Religious Dialogue. It was hosted by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and the Muslim World League. In July 2008 historic interfaith dialogue was initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to solve world problems through concord and not conflict. The conference was attended by religious leaders of different faiths like Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Islam etc. and was co-hosted by King Juan Carlos of Spain in Madrid. In November 2008 interfaith meeting of the Heads of States and Governments was held at the United Nations (UN)—officially described as High level meeting on Culture of Peace. In the said meeting King Abdullahs effort in bringing the interfaith

¹A Common Word. 10 October 2007. 20 May 2009, <http://www.acommonword.com>.

²Dr. John J. DeGioia, Ed., *Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue*, World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland, 2008, p. 38.

dialogue initiative was commended and appreciated by United Nations (UN) Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon.

Hence, Muslims never fore closed the channels of dialogue. They are still active in this field. The work, “Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims”, records:

During the modern period, many Muslim countries around the world, soon after gaining their independence from their colonial masters, sought better relations with the Christians living among them. Representatives of each country's religions met in conferences dedicated to interfaith dialogue. One such conference between Christians and Muslims was held in Tripoli, Libya, on February 1-5, 1976, in cooperation with the Libyan Government and cosponsored by the Vatican. Christian and Muslim delegates from around the world participated in the conference. A joint Declaration of 24 points was issued at the end of the Conference. As a sign of good will, the Catholic Church in Benghazi, Libya, was reopened on December 8, 1977. Muslim and Christian scholars from Africa, the Middle East, and other areas were invited to the church's re-opening ceremony. This conference marked a great break-through in Muslim-Christian relations. Muslim Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) endorsed the Declaration of the conference in their meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, on May 12-15, 1976.¹

¹*Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, op.cit., p. 82.

Furthermore the said work gives some of the names of the scholar's active in interfaith dialogue:

Following is a list of the Muslim scholars from the USA and around the world who played key roles in promoting interfaith dialogue in the twentieth century: Isma'il R. Al Faruqi, Jamal Barazanji, Iqbal J. Unus, Muhammad Abdul Raouf, Naim Akbar (USA), Sheikh Ahmad M. Zabara (Yemen), Ali Arslan Edin, Youssef Diaa (Turkey), Mahmoud Albaji (Tunisia) Sheikh Hasan Khattab (Syria), Soulainman Aboubakr (South Africa), Othman Shahin, Husein Muhammad Karibulla (Sudan), Ali Ahmad Hasan (Somalia), Ibrahim Kazem (Qatar), Khurshid Ahmad, Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Pakistan), Ahmad Shahati (Libya), Wahid Iddin Khan, Izzidin Ibrahim (United Arab Emirates), Muhammad Ahmad Khalafalla, Mustafa Mahmoud (Egypt), Sibgatallah Al-Mpujaddidi [sic] (Afghanistan), Najib Al Attas (Malaysia), Jamal Badwi (Canada), and many others.¹

The same work further records names of some Muslim organizations at US and Europe active in interfaith dialogue:

Muslim organizations and scholars throughout history have almost always been supportive of interfaith dialogue. All major Muslim organizations in US and Europe support interfaith dialogue too. Among these are: the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), the Muslim Mission of America, the Muslim

¹Ibid.

American Society (MAS) and the Council of American and Muslim Relations (CAIR) [sic].¹

Commenting on these kinds of peace initiatives, Rajmohan Gandhi, Karam Chand Gandhi's grandson and a scholar of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, says: "These widely different and independent peace initiatives suggest the possibility of a "wall of peace" that can join different communities together."² Therefore one is bound to recognize that Muslims were/are involved in interfaith dialogue initiatives. Though Islam and Muslims are being defamed by the so called labels of 'Terrorists', 'Extremists' and 'Fundamentalists' and are wrongly supposed to be against the peace initiatives and dialogue. Nevertheless Muslims in the same propagandist countries have taken the initiative of interfaith dialogue and are promoting peace. Thus John L. Esposito says:

American Muslims have made, and continue to make, significant contributions to defining and redefining Islam in terms of issues of identity (the relationship of religion to culture), pluralism, tolerance, human rights, and democratization. Their influence and impact is felt not only in North America, but also globally. North American Muslims have also become an important bridge between Islam and the west, for, indeed, they are part and parcel of the west; they are citizens, neighbors, and workers.³

¹Ibid.

²Rajmohan Gandhi in Dr. John J. DeGioia, op.cit., p. 38.

³Esposito, John L., 'Moderate Muslims: A Mainstream of Modernists, Islamists, Conservatives, and Traditionalists', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Association of Muslim Social Scientists and International Institute of Islamic thought, Herndon, USA, vol. 22, Summer 2005, No. 3, p. 19.

He further says:

...At the same time, post-9/11, there is a danger to the future of Islam and Muslims in the west: Islamophobia. This danger effects issues of citizenship, civil liberties, employment, and other areas of life. Islamophobia is a growing reality/threat in North America and in Europe.¹

Whatever the situation may be Muslims have to and they in fact are involved in promoting peace through dialogue. Here it is worth to quote M. A. Muqtedar Khan, as he writes:

The presence of a large number of Muslims and their determination to resist assimilation poses several challenges to the west. First, it puts pressure on the west to truly live up to its claims that it is a society that believes in religious tolerance, pluralism, and democracy. The United States has, for a long time, remained a deeply Christian nation while claiming that it is a secular and pluralist society. The arrival of Muslims is testing this. The Patriot Act that profiles Muslims; the rise of Christian evangelism, whose rhetoric demonizes Islam; a new foreign policy that is determined to use force to crush and transform the Muslim world; as well as the scandals of torture and unconscionable conduct at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, are all signs that the United States has difficulty in living up to its own values when interacting with Muslims. Perhaps democracy was always fragile in the west, and the advent of Muslims only exposed it. But with

¹Ibid.

the emergence of both American and European Muslim identities, the west will also discover that it has allies within its Muslim populations in the form of Muslims who are equally determined that western claims to democracy and freedom of religion are substantiated in reality and policy.

The Muslim presence in the west has the potential to improve Muslim-Christian and Muslim-Jewish relations through the various interfaith dialogues that are taking place in the west today. Interfaith meetings and Muslims lecturing in churches and synagogues are now regular events in Europe and North America. There are genuine theological developments and also mutual recognition and appreciation at these events that could eventually have a global impact.¹

Furthermore, another scholar, adding to the same and pointing towards the reasons of the presence of Muslims in non-Muslim countries, especially in the west and precautions and duties these Muslim migrants took, says:

...Muslims migrated to the west for several reasons. Chief among them are the failures of their own societies and the failure of the modernization models adopted by their home countries. Muslims left their homes in search of a better life in Europe and the United States. Once in the west, probably less than 5 percent of

¹Khan, M.A. Muqtedar, 'Islamic Democracy and Moderate Muslims: The Straight Path Runs through the Middle', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Association of Muslim Social Scientists and International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, USA, vol. 22, Summer 2005, No.3, pp. 48-9.

them rebuilt their Islamic identity. In the first stage, they reminded themselves and their families that they already had an identity and thus belonged to something, and that Islam was an important pillar of their identity. They helped each other build a mosque and then a school to prevent the remnants of their former identity from draining away. When they felt that they had adequately protected this identity and that they could maintain it and pass it along, they started to introduce themselves to their neighbors as being their equals. Thus, religious Muslims moved from protecting their essence to building relationships....¹

Muslims, even though in majority, at many times gave chances to the preachers of other faiths to present their view point and to present their faith in front of them and Muslims not only used to hear them carefully but in response they used to present their faith in front of those non-Muslim preachers. Later on these works were published also. Thus a scholar says about these debates as:

In the nineteenth century in those countries where it was possible, such as British India, and, for a time, Iran, there were public debates between Muslims and Christians....One of the leading participants in these on the Christian side was Carl Gottlieb Pfander, who debated publicly in Iran while it was permitted, and then in British India. Several of his books were published, first in Persian and then in English

¹Al-Alwani, Taha Jabir, 'Reflections on the "Moderate Muslims" Debate', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Association of Muslim Social Scientists and International Institute of Islamic thought, Herndon, USA, vol. 22, Summer 2005, No. 3, p. 116.

translations. The chief of these is The Mizan ul Haqq, or Balance of Truth.¹

While one is mentioning the dialogues and debates of past it is neither to be underestimated nor to be forgotten that debates and dialogues of this kind continues to win the hearts of the people of the contemporary world. Thus a scholar says:

During the last quarter of a century there have been dozens of seminars, conferences and other group meetings in which Muslims and Christians have joined together to discuss matters of common interest in the religious field. Some of these have been extremely informal, while others have been official or semi-official. Among the latter one might mention the visit by a party from the Vatican to the University of al-Azhar in Cairo in April 1978 and Colonel Qadhafi's seminar of Islamo-Christian Dialogue at Tripoli in February 1976, in which teams of about fifteen Muslims and Christians (the latter from the Vatican) discussed a number of matters in the presence of five hundred observers, of whom I was privileged to be one. Informal meetings, however, have probably achieved more than these official occasions.²

One may be talking about the letter addressed to the Christian clergy by a group of Muslims on the occasion of the '*Id ul-Fitr* (2007) inviting them to the 'common word between Muslims and them'. It was initiated by a Jordanian organization, Royal Academy of The Royal *Aal al-Bayt* Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan, under the patronage of King Abdullah II. While one can argue whether or not the 138 signatories of this

¹Watt, William Montgomery, op.cit., pp. 105-6.

²Ibid., p. 125.

letter constitute the *ijmā‘* (consensus) of the *Ummah*, or about the motives of the Jordanian King in patronizing the initiative, many may agree that the wordings and the content of the letter appear to be in agreement with the Islamic point of view. The letter has by and large received a resounding welcome among the Christian clergy and the theological faculty particularly in the west, though not from their politicians. Most of them have committed to work for the cause of bringing the followers of the two faiths closer in the interest of not only the worldly peace but also in compliance of their religious obligation. The background of the open letter ‘A Common Word Between Us and You’, dated 13 October 2007, can be summarized as:

This letter is a follow up to a smaller letter in 2006, which had been a response to Pope Benedict XVI’s 12 September 2006 lecture at the University of Regensburg. This lecture, on faith and reason, focused mainly on Christianity and what Pope Benedict called the tendency to “exclude the question of God” from reason. Islam features in a part of the lecture: the Pope quoted a Byzantine emperor’s strong criticism of Muhammad’s teachings. Pope Benedict clarified that this was not his own personal opinion, describing the quotation as being of a “startling brusqueness, a brusqueness which leaves us astounded”.

One month later, 38 Islamic scholars representing all branches of Islam, replied to Pope Benedict, in “An Open Letter to the Pope”, dated 13 October 2006. In “A Common Word”, dated 13 October 2007, 138 Islamic personalities wrote to promote interfaith dialogue and to declare that there is some

common ground between Islam and Christianity.¹

The letter was addressed to the leaders of Christians everywhere including Pope Benedict XVI, the patriarchs of the Orthodox churches and to the leaders of the larger Christian denominations. As far as the authorship of the letter and its weightage is concerned:

The letter is signed by 138 prominent Muslim personalities from a large number of countries from several continents. These include academics, intellectuals, scholars, government ministers, political advisors, authors, muftis and media chiefs. Of the signatories, nearly half are university academics or scholars. A group of scholars affiliated with the non-governmental, international independent research institute The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, Jordan, the sponsors of the letter, helped in drafting it over a period of three years. A number of signatories of the letter have large followings throughout the Islamic world and beyond.²

The contents of the letter are: List of Addressees, Summary and Abridgement, Love of God, Love of God in Islam, Love of God as the First and Greatest Commandment in the Bible, Love of the Neighbour, Love of the Neighbour in Islam, Love of the Neighbour in the Bible, Come to a Common Word Between Us and You, Notes, and Signatories. Signatories include: Mustafa Ceric, Aref Ali Nayed, Ali Lakhani, Amr Khaled, Feisal Abdul Rauf, Nihad Awad, Hamza Yusuf, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Anwar Ibrahim, Tareq Al-

¹Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. 2007. 20 May 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Common_Word_Between_Us_and_You>.

²Ibid.

Suwaidan, Murad Hofmann, Kabir Helminski, Rawil Gaynetdin, Nuh Ha Mim Keller, Timothy Winter, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu and H.A. Hellyer. Some Christian leaders and lay persons and academics welcomed this letter as a basis for promoting mutual understanding and furthering dialogue between Islam and Christianity.¹

Historic interfaith dialogue, initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to solve world problems through concord and not conflict, resulted in many interfaith gatherings. Syed Neaz Ahmad writes about this initiative:

...The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia launched this initiative in Makkah three years ago. He called on all 57 Muslim heads of the state to meet in Islam's holiest city to ponder the issues of extremism and call for a Muslim renaissance. He called on his fellow heads of the state to lead a new age of scientific, economic, and cultural achievements that would echo the golden age of Islam from the 9th through the 13th century, and reach out to other faiths to avoid a clash of civilizations.

The King reiterated that message in words and deed, ultimately leading in June 2008 to a historic meeting of Islamic scholars that called for more robust dialogue with the outside world, shortly thereafter followed by a gathering in Madrid that King Abdullah hosted alongside King Juan Carlos of Spain. At an impressive and heart warming moment in human history, he met with priests, rabbis, Hindu luminaries, and a

¹Ibid.

wide range of leaders from the major philosophies of the world.¹

He further writes:

King Abdullah's initiative at Madrid has set the stage. It aspires to open a sincere, respectful, and frank interfaith and intercultural dialogue. The King's hope is that this gathering can begin to lay (or renew and repair) the foundations for the values needed to render globalization beneficial to all mankind.²

Though King Abdullah had never made any overtures for dialogue with eastern religious leaders such as Hindus and Buddhists. But the present interfaith dialogue initiative initiated by him not only invited religious scholars and leaders of Hinduism and Buddhism but also the leaders and scholars of Sikhism were invited. One must remember that though Muslims do not have any authentic reference either from the Qur'ān or from the Ḥadīth that religions other than Judaism and Christianity are based on revealed scriptures or had a prophet or messenger appointed by Allah. But still there is a doubt that may be they are based on some revealed scripture sent to any messenger of Allah by Him. Because according to Islam there was not a single nation/people were a *Hādī* (Guide) was not sent by Almighty Allah. On this basis many Muslim Scholars suggest that the respected and revered personalities of other religions may had been divinely appointed prophets and later on their original messages were distorted by there followers. But it is evident that the religions which were founded after the prophethood of Muhammad (SAAS) are false and are totally baseless. Because according to the Qur'ān

¹Ahmad, Syed Neaz, '*The Muslim World League*', Muslim World League, Makkah Mukarramah, vol. 37, No. 1, Muḥarram 1430-January 2009, p. 22.

²Ibid.

Muhammad (SAAS) is the last *nabī* and no prophet will come after him (SAAS). Hence there will be no guidance or message after his (SAAS). Therefore, the religions like Sikhism, Bahaism, Qadianism, etc., according to Islam are not based on any revealed scripture or message. Moreover, the religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and even Judaism and Christianity, according to Islam, are not now to be followed because by the coming of last and final prophet Muhammad (SAAS) those all religions which might had been founded on a divinely revealed scripture are abrogated. So inviting scholars and religious leaders like of Sikhism by King Abdullah is showing that Muslims are very open as far as mutual understanding is concerned. It was King Abdullah and his government responsible for the ‘Peace of Culture’ which took place on November 2008 at the United Nations General Assembly. It brought together leaders including former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair, Israeli President Shimon Peres, George W Bush and King Abdullah of Jordan. It brought together Muslim and non-Muslim nations to eradicate the preconception of Islam and Terrorism.

There are many other countries, their leaders and scholars who are active in interfaith dialogue. Many organizations under the supervision and support of political or religious leaders are working in this field. Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country with a history of tolerance and respect for religious diversity, has active dialogue events across many sectors. One body reflecting this diversity is the ‘Institute for Inter-Faith Dialogue’, which hosts discussion groups for religious school teachers across diverse traditions. According to the institute dialogue is ‘not meant to undermine differences’, but it is ‘a step undertaken in an effort to establish communication, as well as an expression of readiness to listen’.

As far as the institutes and organizations related with interfaith dialogue in America and Europe are concerned, ‘Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims’ states:

Leaders in Islamic approaches to peace building, justice, and dialogue within the interfaith context are American University's School of International Service, Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, and the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute, to name a few. Also to be included are Hartford Seminary's Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations and, most recently, Nazareth College in Rochester New York, which took the initiative to establish the Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue (CISD). The common principles of CISD are: to develop skills which would clarify and improve individual and community-wide communications on matters of religion, faith, and spirituality; to understand individual and communal faiths; to establish a methodology proper to such goals; and to develop the capacity for living in a pluralistic world. The Center seeks to develop research tools, knowledge, and skills to benefit our common humanity. CISD envisions an environment conducive to understanding the diversity of faiths in our world and community; and to communicating the skills necessary for people of diverse faiths to live together in peace and justice.¹

It further states:

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) has made interfaith dialogue a part of its mission statement and has created a Leadership Forum

¹*Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, op.cit., pp. 26-7.

where among other things imams will be trained in interfaith work. Similarly, the Salam Institute in Washington, D. C. in collaboration with ISNA has undertaken the task of organizing a conference on Muslim Peace building, justice, and Interfaith Dialogue.¹

Support for interfaith dialogue is evident in America and across the world. In January 2002 the Alexandria Interreligious Conference was held and from that meeting the First Alexandria Declaration was developed. This interfaith milestone was generated by a joint consultation of at least eighteen Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars and religious leaders from the Holy Land. The conference took place in Alexandria, Egypt and was co-hosted by the Grand Imam of al-Azhar. For further details of this interfaith dialogue and its declarations and many other interfaith dialogues and their declarations one can see the Appendixes of 'Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims'.²

As far as India is concerned, it too is getting support for interfaith dialogue. Many lectures, seminars, debates and conferences were/are held by different individuals and non-governmental organizations. Scholars of different faiths organize interfaith dialogues and participate in them. Samvāda, a voluntary organization has conducted many seminars and conferences related with interfaith dialogue and the proceedings of these seminars and conferences have been published. The third All India Seminar was held under the auspices of Samvāda during March 17-19, 2006, at Navsadhana, Varanasi on the topic 'The Place of Reason and Faith in Religion'.³ The fifth All India Seminar was held under

¹Ibid., p. 39.

²See Ibid., pp. 100-113.

³See published work, Prof. L.N. Sharma, Ed., *The Place of Reason and Faith in Religion*, Shri Karshni Vidya Bhawan, Deendayal Nagar, Varanasi, 2006.

the auspices of Samvāda during January 29-31, 2007 at Ardha Kumbha Melā, Prayag on the topic “The Concept of the ‘Other’ in Religion”.¹ Similarly 6th All India Seminar was held under the auspices of Samvāda, in Banaras, Varanasi, from 24th to 26th February, 2008 on the topic ‘Relevance of Religion in the Contemporary Age’.² Scholars of different faiths participated in these seminars and presented there views and understanding on the said topics. Among the other Muslim scholars who presented there papers in the said seminars the prominent are: Abdul Ali, Prof., Dept. of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, I.H. Azad Faruqui, Prof., Dept. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, Dr. Mohd. Ishaque, Prof., Dept. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, Abdul Qadir Jafari, Prof. and Head, Dept. of Arabic & Persian, University of Allahabad, Allahabad, M. Maroof Shah, BVSc., Kashmir, Dr. Razi Ahmad Kamal, Professor, Dept. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and Dr. Abdul Hamid Naumani, *Jamaitual Ulema-e-Hind*.

An International Conference on interfaith dialogue was held on the topic ‘Towards Human Understanding Through Dialogue’ on October 24 to 26, 2008 at India Islamic Cultural Centre, New Delhi. The Conference was jointly organized by: Institute of Objective Studies, IOS Centre for Arabic & Islamic Studies, and Universal Peace Foundation, New Delhi.* Furthermore, Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi, organized a lecture on November 6, 2009 at their lecture hall on the topic ‘Inter-faith Dialogue: Issues & Challenges’. Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui,

¹See published work, Prof. L.N. Sharma, Ed., *The Concept of the ‘Other’ in Religion*, Shri Karshni Vidya Bhawan, Deendayal Nagar, Varanasi, 2007.

²See published work, Prof. L.N. Sharma, Ed., *Relevance of Religion in the Contemporary Age*, Shri Karshni Vidya Bhawan, Deendayal Nagar, Varanasi, 2009.

*Authors own observations.

Senior Research Fellow, Islamic Foundation Leister, U.K. was the speaker.*

On 24th and 25th March 2007, Iran Culture House, New Delhi organized an International Seminar at India Habitat Centre on the Topic ‘Dialogue Among Islam and Hinduism’. Many scholars presented their views on the said topic. Thus a healthy dialogue took place.*

Similarly, Centre for the Study of Comparative Religions and Civilization, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi and Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, Canada jointly organized ‘Global Congress on World’s Religions, After September 11– An Asian Perspective’. Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi had the honor of hosting this historical event. Scholars of different religious traditions and participants from different parts of the world encouraged the organizers by being present in this event. The event took place from 17 to 19 January 2009.*

Moreover, on 20-21 of Feb. 2010 an International Conference was hosted by Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. The Conference was held under the tilte, International Dialogue Between Islam & Oriental Religions”. The Conference was jointly organized by many Muslim organizations and institutes namely: World Union of Muslim Scholars, All India Muslim Personal Law Board, All India Muslim *Majlis-e Mushawarat, Jamaat-e Islami Hind, Jamiat Ulama-e Hind, Markazi Jamiat Ahl-e Hadith*, Islamic Fiqh Academy, *Imarat-e Sharia Bihar & Orissa*, Zakir Husain Institute of Islamic Studies, Interfaith Coalition for Peace & The Milli Gazette. The presence of internationally reputed scholars and religious figures made the event a success. Among whom the worthy to be mentioned are: Prof. Akhtarul Wasey (Delhi, India), Prof. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi (Kashmir), Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan (Delhi, India), Prof. Ali al-Quradaghi (Qatr), Jagatguru Onkaranad Saraswati of Prayag Peeth, Dr. Ibrahim an-Naimi (Qatr), Maulana Abdullah Saud (Banaras, India), Shri Jugat Kishore Shastri

(Ayodhya, India), Swami Laxmi Shankar Acharia, Prof. M.D. Nalapat (Manipal, India), Mrs. Sheela Karina (Pakistan), Syed Ali Shah Gilani (Kashmir), Prof. Shafiq Ahmad Nadwi (Delhi, India), and Dr. Muieduz Zafar (Kashmir). The papers were presented by scholars and religious figures of Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, and the event was attended by adherents of different faiths. At the end of the conference a resolution was unanimously passed.*¹

*Authors own observations.

¹For further details log on to www.islamandorientalreligions.org.

CONCLUSION

Any concept or thought should have a specified aim and purpose and dialogue, indeed, has a lofty one (purpose). Actually, human society needs cordiality and togetherness which can be had through dialogue. It is so because Islam advocates making acquaintance with others. In other words it calls upon people to meet each other, to live together and to give and take whatever is useful according to the needs of each other. Thus it advocates coexistence, with all the giving and taking that it involves and also the lasting mutual influence, avoiding all racial chauvinism, regional discrimination and cultural arrogance. Thus, Islam does not recognize any reason why one may be considered superior to the other, except in faith. And so far as the case of faith is concerned, it is a thing that people must choose for themselves. That is why Allah has not forced anyone to be a true believer and has given him the free will to choose between various options. The Qur'ān says: "Say, "The Truth is from your Lord" let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it)...." To achieve this end, "follow your way and let others to follow their ways" is the required principle which would bring forth cordiality and tolerance. However, it still remains that the issue of tolerance examined from this wider perspective needs clarification, albeit from a brief discussion of the morphology of the word tolerance. The word *tasāmūh* (meaning tolerance) has the same form as that of *ta'āyush* (meaning coexistence) and coined on the basis of the form *tafā'uł*. It is closer in meaning to the verb of origin which is that of forgiving, or to the meaning of spontaneous compliance resulting from the tolerance of the religion itself and its call to all Muslims to be tolerant. All this in spite of the fact that one do not discard the form of *tafā'uł* which refers to the notion of participating in efficacy and reciprocity. This obviously points to the positive stand of Islam

towards mutual forgiving, if the other party is capable of doing so also. As such by knowing and respecting each other through dialogue and communication societies can avoid mistrust, overcome differences, and establish harmonious relations.

The central problem of the modern highly complex world is not ideological but practical. It is neither relevant nor important today to win followers for a particular ideology or theory but to inspire in man a sense of responsibility and freedom. If there is this sense, the process of communication is facilitated. The world peace cannot be accomplished by raising slogans. We require, for this purpose, individuals who are free, who communicate freely and, above all, who respect theirs as well as other's personalities. The peace is possible if and only if there is peace in each heart; if each man is free from inner conflicts, if each can be free from the desire to subject others to his will.

Since dialogue involves different individuals or group of individuals who try to understand each others' position regarding their religio-cultural positions, it needs certain rules and a special ethics. Different scholars have highlighted and formulated the basic ethics for a person who is interested in a purposeful dialogue. Certain other norms could, however, be added to the list. These are being polite and gentle, speaking softly, not speaking ill of others, avoiding direct criticism of others, not compromising on the basic principles of one's faith, suppressing anger, observing patience, giving humane treatment, smiling and laughing gently, attending to the speaking person, being alert, avoiding continuous speaking, being ready to community work, being punctual and observing cleanliness.

Contemporary world is caught in violence and thus the security of life and property remains always in threat. The pressure of the strife is now felt by one and all. That is why man tries to find a way to get rid of it. Although complete and ideal peace

is not so easy to be achieved, still the intensity of the violent times could be softened to a large extent. Moreover, contemporary life is characterized by a “time-space compression” that is evidenced by inexpensive air travel and the ever-present use of telephones, fax, and more recently, e-mail and social networks. Television access is increasingly widespread even if sets are not owned by individual households. The world is not just becoming the same; it is also becoming more pluralistic. It is almost exclusively under this meaning of globalization that religion appears as part of the process rather than as either irrelevant bystander or victim. Furthermore, the remarkable feeling of proximity between people and nations is the unmistakable reality of our globalized world. Encounters with other peoples’ ways of life, current affairs, politics, welfare and faiths are more frequent than ever. We are not only able to see other cultures more clearly, but also to see our differences more sharply. The information intensity of modern life has made this diversity of ideology part of our every day consciousness.

In the contemporary world, different religious communities accuse each other for their misfortunes. However, Muslims and Islam are targeted the most. Nevertheless, dialogue provides the Muslims an opportunity to do away with these accusations. As such dialogue is a means by which false slanders and false accusations against Islam can be refuted and marginalize the forces which fabricate them and incite and induce people of them. In the forefront is the introduction of Islamic Principles to non-Muslims, removal of suspicions against it and correction of the wrong notions and wrong conceptions about Islam. Messages of all prophets from Adam (AS) to Muhammad (SAAS), were sent with one content and one meaning, i.e. the call to worship Allah alone not to associate with Him in worshipping. The initiative for the Muslim-Christian-Jew dialogue was taken by the Muslims under Allah’s order.

Notwithstanding the efficacy of dialogue, it is a fact that the adherents of different religious communities are reluctant to and suspicious about the process of dialogue. The Muslims, in particular, take dialogue very cautiously. The important reservations which they talk about are:

1. The aim of dialogue may be to form a new religion on which men could be united.
2. The aim may also be to de-Islamise the Muslims.
3. It may be also to make them abandon *Dā'wah*, which is otherwise a duty for them.
4. It may be also an endeavour to make them totally indifferent of their religion.

Whatever the results, positive or negative, of dialogue, different religious communities can never reach a stage where there will be no differences and all humans will have just one faith or worldview. Difference is also in the nature of humans. Holders of any view believe that the truth lies with them. It is the dialogue that helps each differing group to contemplate upon and examine its beliefs and change its position, if convinced of the truth of its opponent.

Nevertheless, there are negative aspects of dialogue which could not be underestimated. Most of these arise because dialogue is a cloistered activity carried on by the elitists of different religious groups and those elitists have no (or negligible) influence at the grass root level. That is why they are neither able to implement the results of dialogue nor are they in a position to purge the society of the activities and behavior which challenge the whole process of dialogue.

However, it is a fact that very little work is being done by the Muslims at intellectual and academic front in an integrated and institutionalized way to confront this stupendous challenge of alienation and confrontation. The centers of learning on comparative religion (Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, etc.) and civilization and

area studies relating the western social, economic and scientific developments and international relations need to be established in a good deal. This will, on the one hand, make the Muslims discover the Western civilization in a comprehensive way and on the other hand exchange mutually whatever positive and pragmatic the two have for humanity in general. Broader areas of co-operation in terms of academic, economic, science and technology etc. can be worked out through the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding. For example, in the area of medicine when the Muslim indigenous knowledge will go along with the Western research and technology the end results can be more productive. The interest-free banking of Islam where there is no economic exploitation but more profit and gains on equity basis render much to both sides of economic development fairly. Similarly, the common threats to humanity like global warming, illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, and weapons of mass destruction and alleviation of poverty can be faced by mutual cooperation.

Nevertheless, dialogue is never totally irrelevant. Human nature demands that they talk to each other and try to settle out differences through dialogue instead of using force. So when dialogue among the people or nations or faiths is promoted honestly and extensively, it will definitely succeed in bringing nations and faiths closer to one another and contribute positively to the alliance of civilizations.

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